World Council of Churches

Resource Book for the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

Where Now for Visible Unity?

Wadi El Natrun, Egypt, 24-28 October 2025

Faith and Order Paper No. 242

Edited by
Martin Illert

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Production: Lyn van Rooyen, coordinator, WCC Publications
Cover design: Juliana Schuch
Book design and typesetting: Juliana Schuch
ISBN: 978-2-8254-1902-1
eBook ISBN: 978-2-8254-190-8

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Welcome Messages

His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

With great joy, I welcome you all to Egypt—a land blessed by the footsteps of the Holy Family, a sacred destination that has embraced the Christian faith since its earliest days. Your presence here for the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order fills our hearts with gratitude and hope.

We are especially honoured to host this historic gathering in Wadi El Natrun, one of the most ancient and spiritually rich centres of Christian monasticism in the world. The silent prayers and ascetic lives of countless monks across centuries have made this valley a wellspring of faith, devotion, and unity. It is here, at the Logos Papal Centre, within the grounds of the historic St Bishoy Monastery, that we gather. The Centre is a modern facility, only ten years old, yet deeply rooted in the sacred traditions of our Church.

This year, we commemorate 1700 years since the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 CE), a pivotal moment in the history of Christianity. For the Coptic Orthodox Church, this memory is both solemn and treasured, for it is the memory of St Athanasius of Alexandria, our courageous and visionary saint, who played a central role in defending the Nicene Creed and affirming the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we reflect together on the conference theme, "Where Now for Visible Unity?" may our dialogue be filled with love, wisdom, and a shared yearning for the unity Christ prayed for. Let this sacred commemoration renew our commitment to live out the Apostolic faith and strengthen our fellowship across all traditions.

May your time in Egypt be blessed, your hearts inspired, and your witness to Christian unity renewed.

Welcome to Egypt. Welcome to Wadi El Natrun. Welcome to this holy celebration of faith and order.

In Christ,
Pope Tawadros II
Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches

As we meet for the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order and mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, we are reminded of the enduring call to Christian unity. It is a call that resonates deeply with the mission of the World Council of Churches.

For almost a hundred years, the Commission on Faith and Order has borne witness to the quest for visible Christian unity in a divided world. In their endeavour, the commissioners have repeatedly experienced the witness of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as a theological inspiration on the way towards visible unity.

The fact that the Faith and Order World Conference is meeting for the first time outside of Europe or North America is of particular significance. I would like to thank the Coptic Church and His Holiness Pope Tawadros II for the kind invitation to Wadi El Natrun.

It seems remarkable that the greatest support for the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed came from a then newly emerging spiritual movement, monasticism, whose origins lie precisely in the place where we are meeting. It is no coincidence that today the Commission on Faith and Order is again seeking collaboration with newly emerging spiritual movements, thereby striving to expand the table of ecumenical conversation.

The WCC's Strategic Plan (2023–2030), guided by the vision of "A Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity," echoes this spirit. We are committed to fostering ecumenical solidarity, confronting injustice, and healing the wounds of conflict and division. Just as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed became a unifying confession, and just as the witness of the Commission on Faith and Order has inspired the churches on their way towards visible unity, so too must our shared faith inspire actions for peace, climate justice, and the dignity of all God's people.

Let us honour both Nicaea's legacy and the endeavours of the Commission on Faith and Order towards visible unity not only in memory but in movement—praying, celebrating, discussing, and walking together as a global fellowship toward God's promised future of wholeness.

In Christ's grace and hope,
Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay
General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Theological Perspectives on the Sixth World Conference

This section presents key theological perspectives on the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. The moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich, begins by describing the theological journey from the Fifth World Conference in 1993 to the present. In the following contribution, the moderator of the Nicaea Steering Group, Prof. Dr Sandra Beardsall, links the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea to the opportunities and challenges of the Sixth World Conference. In the third contribution, His Eminence Metropolitan Youssef of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Southern USA describes the significance of the Council for the self-understanding of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

"WHERE NOW FOR VISIBLE UNITY?":

The Continuing Pilgrimage of the Commission on Faith and Order from Santiago de Compostela to Wadi El Natrun

*Stephanie Dietrich**

Since the First World Conference in 1927 at Lausanne, the Faith and Order movement has carried the vision of Christian unity at the heart of its mandate. Each conference has wrestled with what *visible unity* means—not just organic or spiritual but embodied in common faith, worship, service, and life. Over time, our vision shifted from institutional unity toward a more holistic unity in faith, doctrine, and shared life.

That is why the old slogan "doctrine divides, service unites" is fundamentally wrong.

We need a continued discourse on the content of our faith, because witness and service, faith and order, and life and work cannot and should not be separated. Visible unity embraces them all.

As the WCC Commission on Faith and Order now prepares for the Sixth World Conference in 2025, this historic trajectory prompts a pressing question: Where do we stand today? And what is our hope and perspective for the future? What is the unity we are seeking?

A Few Glimpses into the Work of the Commission on Faith and Order

Since the Fifth World Conference in Santiago in 1993, the work of Faith and Order has centred on ecclesiology, ecumenical hermeneutics, and ethics. The process on ecclesiology builds on one of the well-known convergence texts, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM),* published in 1982.[1] In it, for the first time in modern history, churches from a wide range of traditions articulate a common understanding of key elements of ecclesial life. While not erasing all differences, BEM achieved a remarkable degree of convergence, affirming the central place of the sacraments and ordained ministry in the church's life and witness.

* Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich is moderator of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order.
1. *Baptism, Eucharist and Memory,* Faith and Order Paper, No. 111 (WCC Publications, 1982), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.118.

Building on this, the 2013 document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV) deepened our shared understanding of the church's nature and mission.*[2] It rooted unity in the triune God, expressed through faith, sacramental communion, and shared ministry. It also highlighted ongoing challenges concerning authority and ethical teachings.

After the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013, Faith and Order analyzed nearly 80 responses to TCTCV. I only want to quote one of the conclusions we drew when analysing the responses: "There is more that unites us than divides us."

Let me add that this obliges us to continue to seek and to deepen what unites us—this visible unity—through theological discourse.

A Changing Landscape

While these theological achievements of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order remain vital resources, the context in which these achievements are received and lived out has changed dramatically. The expansion of Christianity into new styles, the return of confessional assertiveness, the rise of polarization, and the pressures of secular and pluralistic societies all challenge the traditional ecumenical paradigm. One of the most significant developments is the rapid growth of independent, Pentecostal, and non-denominational churches, especially in the global South.

Visible unity today must include voices long excluded—voices from the margins. Theological discourse must not only speak to but arise from the margins. Faith and Order has begun *"broadening the table,"* but more is needed. Indigenous theologies, oral traditions, non-Western ecclesiologies must be heard—not just for inclusion's sake, but because they offer insights that deepen and challenge our joint theological imagination.

Where Now for Visible Unity?

As the churches move toward the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order at Wadi El Natrun, near Alexandria, Egypt, at the invitation of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark of the Coptic Orthodox church, the call to unity remains both deeply theological and urgently practical.

At this point, you might have the impression that Faith and Order is primarily about publications. It is not! It is about people of faith journeying together through theological discourse, and also through friendship and love.

2. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.221.

We desire to journey together as Christians and as human beings, because we are called to seek unity and to live unity.

This call to unity asks not only what we believe together, but how we can walk together—as one body in Christ, witnessing to the gospel in a world that longs for healing and reconciliation.

The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order presents a unique opportunity for the churches to renew their commitment to this pilgrimage. It will not be enough to commemorate past achievements or the historic event of the Council of Nicaea. The conference should become a time for honest reflection, spiritual discernment, and bold imagination. It should be a space for mutual encouragement, for receiving new voices, and for discerning the signs of the Spirit's movement in today's diverse and complex ecclesial landscape.

Ultimately, the unity of the church is not a human project but a participation in the divine life of the triune God. It is Christ who calls, the Spirit who equips, and the Father who draws the church toward the fullness of reconciliation.

This vision resonates deeply with the World Council of Churches' ongoing Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity, which invites churches to talk about unity and to walk together in the face of injustice, suffering, and fragmentation.

The road ahead is long. It will require patience, courage, and prophetic imagination. But most of all, it will require faith—faith that the Spirit is still leading, still gathering, and still calling us to be one.

GATHERING IN THE CONTEXT OF NICAEA

Sandra Beardsall[*]

Sometime in the spring of 325 CE the Roman emperor Constantine enjoined all the world's Christian bishops to assemble at Nicaea, a small city by Lake Askania in what is now northern Türkiye. "Be diligent, without delay in anything, speedily to come," he urged them. That famous summons inaugurated an event whose effects would ripple through the centuries as a touchstone for Christian faith and practice. Now, its 1700th anniversary brings a new summons to a World Conference on Faith and Order. Why are we gathering around the theme of Nicaea? What do we hope to glean from this ancient council to enliven the contemporary search for the visible unity of Christians?

This introduction will address those questions, indicating the ways the Council of Nicaea of 325 CE will help to shape the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order. It will explain how the planners came to choose Nicaea as a focus for a Faith and Order World Conference, describe the Council of Nicaea briefly, and clarify how aspects of that ancient Council will inform discussion at the 2025 World Conference. We hope Conference participants and observers will be infused with the excitement we have experienced as plans and processes for our time in Egypt come to fruition.

Coming to Nicaea as Theme and Touchstone

In 2019, at its meeting in Nanjing, China, Faith and Order commissioners received an exciting suggestion: that it might propose a Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order to coincide with the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. That there should be a sixth Faith and Order world conference, after more than three decades, seemed obvious. And Nicaea? It was intriguing. Such an ancient anniversary! And while a "World Conference" does not, of course, carry the heft or authority of an Ecumenical Council, we sensed a resonance in the goals of both the ancient and the new: the search for Christian unity in faith and practice. How could Nicaea 325 assist us in that quest? A few of us answered the call to consider the possibility, and we formed a small initial planning group.

This small group met with several complexities: COVID-19 and its short- and long-term effects; the WCC's focus on preparing for its 11th Assembly at Karlsruhe in 2022; welcoming a new Faith and Order director and secretariat

* Rev. Prof. Em. Dr Sandra Beardsall is moderator of the WCC's Nicaea 2025 Steering Group.

members; a new commission formed in 2023 with many new members; and, of course, the challenges of serving the gospel in a time of financial precarity for the WCC and its member churches. True to its logo, however, the tiny ship "*Oikoumene*" stayed afloat, and the planning group secured WCC approval to proceed.

We quickly came to some key understandings. First, this Nicene anniversary does not, of course, belong to Faith and Order alone, but to all the members of the body of Christ. Indeed, some churches began in the early 2020s to plan for 2025. The International Theological Commission of the Roman Curia has the "relevance of Nicene faith" as one of its five-year themes. Orthodox-organized conferences began in 2022. Other world communions, regional churches, and academic associations have also begun to mark the anniversary with events and publications. The planning group, therefore, needed to determine the distinctive call of the Nicaea anniversary for Faith and Order. If the primary purpose of the commission is to "serve the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship" for the sake of the world, and since Faith and Order, is arguably the world's most diverse Christian forum, we discerned that our task would be to invite the churches to commemorate *ecumenically*, and to ask how this anniversary could provoke the churches to deepen their desire for and commitment to visible unity.

Secondly, we understood that a world conference, while being a wonderful opportunity, would still be too small to embrace all the possibilities of this historic commemoration. Nicaea 2025 thus became a year-long commemoration. It includes the world conference, but also the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, an online course, regional conferences, and several webinars on key Nicaea topics, such as the search for a common date for Easter, the Bishop of Rome and Christian Unity, and the *Filioque*. Eventually, acknowledging several global ecumenical milestones, the WCC named 2025 as an "ecumenical year."

Faith and Order thus adopted two themes for this ecumenical year: "Living the Apostolic Faith Together Today" for the whole of 2025; for the World Conference, "Where Now for Visible Unity?" The theme for the year recognizes the unifying significance of the faith proclaimed at Nicaea and asks how Christians can use that unity to speak and act together in a fragmented world. A year of commemoration invites all Christians to consider their own experience of the apostolic faith, and to find a variety of ways to explore it ecumenically all year long. The theme for the world conference, "Where Now for Visible Unity?," focuses on the questions of visible unity that have animated the Faith and Order movement for nearly a century. It builds on the legacy of the previous five world conferences in taking stock of where the churches are now in that quest, and what might motivate them to strive ever closer to one another in faith and witness.

Thirdly, we realized that a Nicaea commemoration needs to acknowledge that Christians do not agree on the significance of the Council of Nicaea and its Creed. However, Christians' attitudes vary greatly, not only on the specific disputes of Nicaea 325, but on the church's ancient history more broadly, and on understandings of its legacy for contemporary life. Many churches revere and use the Nicene Creed regularly. Others receive it but use it infrequently or interchange it with other credal statements, Still others reject the use of creeds because they view them as unbiblical and/or they focus on Christians making their own personal faith testimonies. Likewise, there is no one interpretation of the Council of Nicaea or of the churches' conciliar history. Nor do Christians agree on an interpretation of the intersection of imperial politics and gospel proclamation that occurred at Nicaea. However, in the early planning we chose to see these as positive challenges: ways to confront and address anew what divides us as well as what brings us joyfully and prayerfully together. Nicaea, then, has emerged as both theme and touchstone for a time of deep and broad reflection on Christian faith, church, and life in the 21st century.

What Was Nicaea 325?

If Nicaea is to be a touchstone for us, we need to know something of the shape and texture of that stone. While many participants in the world conference are well aware of the details, here is a brief sketch. The Council of Nicaea was the first gathering that sought to bring together Christian leaders—bishops and some clergy—from all over the empire to meet and make decisions about faith and order. The Roman Emperor, Constantine, called and hosted it at Nicaea, a small city that was probably chosen for strategic reasons. It was a complex affair, and there is much we do not know about it. There is no surviving minute book. Exactly who attended the Council, when it started, and precisely how the discussions unfolded are matters of scholarly debate.

The meeting lasted six or seven weeks in early summer. The whole gathering likely totalled about 2000 people, including roughly 250 bishops and their assistants and imperial officials, plus all the women and men who provided food, lodging, and transportation to the participants. Debates were long and often complex. The best-known and most challenging centred on the question of the relationships of the three persons of the Trinity, and specifically the Father and the Son, to address the controversy attributed to the presbyter Arius. As they wrestled their way to a common text, including the famous Greek term *homoousios*, some bishops drafted material that the others then considered. Emperor Constantine contributed frequently to the discussions, but he did not officially chair the proceedings (the chair was Bishop Ossius of Cordova) and he did not have a vote. Constantine was actively interested in Christian theology and wanted doctrinal clarity and accuracy, but scholars suggest what he really

sought was a consensus that would unite a divided Church, and perhaps help bring peace across the empire. The Council produced a letter, a creed, and twenty canons.

The bishops at Nicaea came largely to a consensus; almost all of them signed their names to the words of the Creed. However, the Creed ended with condemnations, and not everyone went home content. The bitter divisions around trinitarian theology continued for over five decades. Still, Nicaea's Creed persisted, expanded in the late 4th century as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It has stood for centuries as the one truly ecumenical creed. Beyond the Creed, there is the sheer marvel that the Council happened at all. A humble religious sect, only a decade after the end of a brutal imperial persecution, found its leaders gathered from the ends of a vast empire to sit together and find common cause on matters of faith and practice. These bishops in council managed to imagine a unified Christianity and struggle to a fragile consensus. That moment, perhaps flawed, perhaps compromised, nonetheless unites Christians worldwide, despite all the ways they have since divided themselves from one another. These features make the Council of Nicaea a touchstone for our ecumenical work today.

Nicaea at the Sixth World Conference: Faith, Mission, Unity

The small initial Sixth World Conference planning group was expanded to become more comprehensive in size and scope. This wider group returned to the question of how Nicaea and the World Conference should relate to each other. It reaffirmed that the conference agenda would reflect both ancient and contemporary concerns. How does Nicaea figure in these plans? We might consider *Nicaea* to encompass a creed, a council, and a context. The Creed, as a rich yet concise theological text and a lasting instrument of unity, tends to have the highest profile, and to be the first assumed topic of a discussion of Nicaea. And of course, it will loom large in the World Conference.

However, the topics and the conciliar processes of the Council, and its emphasis on achieving unity are also significant. There was much on the table, including the date of Easter, discipline of excommunicated church leaders, reconciliation with former dissenters, the priority of synods, readmitting those who lapsed under persecution, and standing or kneeling in prayer. Some of the topics have changed, but the goal of unity remains. What can we learn about seeking unity from the processes the bishops followed in coming to consensus on creed, letter, and canons?

Finally, there is the Nicene context itself. In 325 CE, Christians were navigating their mission within an immense empire in flux; they were often at the mercy of imperial whim and will. These challenges, too, resonate with those

that face 21st-century global Christianity. How do the churches today undertake their mission in a world torn by violence, climate catastrophe, and uncertainty?

This is not a conference on patristic studies. However, these three Nicene elements: creed, council, and context—or faith, unity, and mission—will deepen and inform contemporary ecumenical tasks, as the conference seeks to respond to the question, "Where *Now* for Visible Unity?" Credal themes will infuse the spiritual life of the conference, both in prayer and in the desert context of our Coptic hosts. On the three theme days, Faith (Saturday), Mission (Monday), and Unity (Tuesday), each morning will feature two plenary presentations: the first with three keynote speakers; the second with four or more panelists in discussion with the panel moderator. In each of the keynote panels (Faith, Mission, Unity), one presenter has been asked to speak from the perspective of "Nicene commemoration," one from the perspective of the work of Faith and Order, and one from the perspective of the wider ecumenical movement. The hope is to effect an intersection or cross-pollination among three aspects of the ecumenical life: 325 CE, the Faith and Order movement, and the wider search for Christian unity.

Meanwhile, in each of the theme discussion presentations, part of the conversation will involve the panelists considering the ways the apostolic faith and the Nicene Creed transect or inform their contexts—or not—within the framework of their topic. We thus imagine that Nicaea will weave its way into the World Conference in multiple ways for each participant— as a guide, a challenge, a puzzle, a perspective, an inspiration, and a source of hope.

One thousand, seven hundred years ago, church leaders received an improbable summons: to gather in one place and find a way to be of one mind and heart, in faith and in life. Every diverse gathering of Christians seeking unity owes something to the courage of those who took up that bidding. We hope this World Conference will help invigorate the quest for Christian unity, for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the world God so loves.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

Its Enduring Significance for the Coptic Orthodox Church

His Eminence Metropolitan Youssef

The Council in Ecclesial Memory

The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 CE was one of the defining moments in the life of the Church. Convened by Emperor Constantine to address the Arian controversy, it represents the Church's solemn response to the challenge of doctrinal distortion and ecclesial disunity. For the Coptic Orthodox Church, this anniversary is not only a matter of historical remembrance but a living invitation to return to the roots of apostolic faith, Christological clarity, and conciliar unity.

The Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order is being convened at a moment of profound reflection among Christians. As Christians seek visible unity, the memory of the Council of Nicaea compels us to ask: "What does it mean to confess the same faith as the early Church?" The Coptic Orthodox Church offers a witness rooted in suffering, fidelity, and theological depth—one that understands the Council not as a distant event but as a continuing covenant of faith that is upheld in every liturgy, canon, and confession.

The Doctrinal Triumph of the Council of Nicaea: The True Faith Confessed

At the heart of the Council's legacy lies the Nicene Creed, an expression of the Church's unwavering commitment to the truth of the incarnation. The controversy of the time centred on the teachings of Arius, who claimed that the Son was a created being—a *heteroousios* being (of a different essence) from the Father. The Fathers, guided by the Holy Spirit, responded with the clear and definitive formulation: "ὁμοούσιος τῷ Πατρί" (homoousios tō Patri)—"of one essence with the Father."

This theological clarity has salvific implications. As St Athanasius states: "If the Word is not truly God, then we are not truly saved."[1]

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* Metropolitan Youssef is a Coptic Orthodox Metropolitan of Southern USA and a member of the WCC Faith and Order Commission.

1. St Athanasius, *Apologia Contra Arianos*, Book I, §15.

The Coptic Orthodox Church teaches that only one who is fully divine and fully human can reconcile God and man. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, of the thrice blessed memory, affirmed: "To believe that Christ is of one essence with the Father is to believe in salvation itself, for only God can redeem us."[2]

Thus, the Nicene formulation is not merely doctrinal precision. It is a confession of the mystery of redemption itself. It guards the very heart of the gospel and upholds the unbroken apostolic tradition of the Church.

St Athanasius the Apostolic: Defender of the Nicene Faith

The Coptic Church reveres St Athanasius of Alexandria as the theological architect of Nicene orthodoxy. Although he was only a deacon during the Council, his theological insights and later defence of the Creed earned him the title "Father of Orthodoxy."

His exile-ridden life—five exiles over seventeen years—was marked by courageous witness to the divinity of Christ. His works, particularly *On the Incarnation* and *Contra Arianos*, became the doctrinal compass for generations of believers. In his famous Christological summary, he wrote: "He became man so that we might become god."[3]

For St Athanasius, the Incarnation was not merely a theological event, but the healing of the human condition, a real deification through union with the Logos. His steadfast commitment—despite political threats and ecclesiastical opposition—secured the triumph of Nicene orthodoxy.

The Coptic Orthodox Church continues to celebrate his feast day? and commemorate him liturgically. His memory serves as a living call to fidelity, theological courage, and ecclesial truth.

The Canons of Nicaea: Conciliar Order and Ecclesial Identity

While the doctrinal achievement of the Council of Nicaea is rightly emphasized, its canonical decisions are equally significant. The 20 canons issued by the council reflect a deep pastoral concern for discipline, unity, and order within the life of the Church. For the Coptic Orthodox tradition, these canons are not merely administrative; they are expressions of apostolic authority, received and preserved within the life of the Church.

One of the most significant canons is Canon 6, which recognizes the authority of the ancient patriarchates and particularly affirms the primacy of the See of Alexandria in Egypt and its neighbouring regions: "Let the ancient

2. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, *The Nature of Christ* (St Shenouda Monastery, 1999), 18.

3. St Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, §54.

customs prevail which are in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis, so that the bishop of Alexandria has authority over all these, since this is the custom also of the bishop of Rome."[4]

This canon not only affirms the apostolic origin of the Alexandrian See—founded by St Mark the Evangelist—but also safeguards its jurisdictional integrity and ecclesiastical leadership in the wider Christian world.

Other canons of the Council address:

- Prohibition of self-castration (Canon 1)
- Readmission of the lapsed under penance (Canon 11)
- Regulations concerning ordinations and episcopal jurisdictions (Canons 2–5)
- Unity in liturgical practices such as the dating of Pascha (Canon 7)

These canons shaped the governance of the Church for centuries. They remain embedded in the tradition of Coptic Canon Law, forming part of the foundational documents of synodal order in the Church.

As the Coptic Synaxarium commemorates the Council annually on 7 Bashans, it does not only celebrate doctrinal victory, but also the gift of conciliar governance, in which bishops gathered not as political actors, but as servants of truth and shepherds of souls.

Nicaea and the Martyrial Identity of the Church

The Coptic Church approaches the Nicene legacy through the lens of martyrdom. Coming from a Church that endured severe persecutions under Diocletian, the Council of Nicaea represented not merely doctrinal triumph but the vindication of the faith of the martyrs.

The Coptic liturgical calendar begins in fact with Anno Martyrum (A.M.), the "Year of the Martyrs," starting in 284 CE. For Copts, true Orthodoxy is sealed in blood and lived in ascetic discipline. The Nicene faith, therefore, is not abstract doctrine: it is existential confession, even unto death.

The Nicene Creed in Coptic Liturgical and Catechetical Life

In the Coptic Divine Liturgy of St Basil, the Nicene Creed is recited after the Liturgy of the Word and before the Anaphora. This placement is deliberate—it is a public affirmation of faith before entering the eucharistic mystery.

4. Canons of the Council of Nicaea, Canon 6, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3801.htm.

The Creed unites the faithful with the Fathers and the saints. It is not simply read—it is proclaimed. Catechumens are taught to memorize and internalize it, forming the very structure of Coptic baptismal preparation.

Each phrase holds deep patristic and biblical weight:

- "Light of Light." This echoes John 1:9 and St Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on divine illumination.
- "Begotten not made." This is a phrase lifted from the anti-Arian defence of divine eternality.
- "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven." This expresses soteriology grounded in the Incarnation.

This Creed shapes not only the theology but the spiritual identity of the believer, forming a bridge between doctrine and devotion.

The Ecumenical Significance of the Council of Nicaea for Dialogue Today

In a world fractured by doctrinal divisions, the Council of Nicaea offers a common starting point for ecumenical conversation. The Nicene Creed is recited by almost all major Christian bodies, including Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and many Protestant traditions.

For the Coptic Orthodox Church, genuine ecumenism is founded not on theological minimalism, but on the full integrity of the apostolic faith. As Pope Shenouda III wrote: "Unity must be in the faith, not just in emotion or sentiment. The faith is what makes the Church one."[5]

Thus, the road to unity must pass through Nicaea, where the faith of the Fathers was sealed in spirit and truth. Any attempt at reunion must take seriously the trinitarian and Christological boundaries set by this Council.

The Paschal Controversy and the Unity of the Resurrection Feast

Among the critical issues addressed at the Council of Nicaea was the matter of the Paschal date—the timing of the Feast of the Resurrection. Before the Council, various local churches observed Easter on different dates, with some in Asia Minor following the Quartodeciman tradition of celebrating Pascha on the 14th of Nisan, irrespective of the weekday. Others, particularly in Rome and Alexandria, celebrated the Feast on the Sunday following the Jewish Passover.

This lack of unity threatened the very visible expression of one Church, one faith, one Lord. The Fathers at Nicaea, seeking to restore ecclesial harmony,

5. Pope Shenouda III, *Nature of the Church*, 44.

declared that the resurrection should be observed by all churches on the same Sunday.

Though the precise formula adopted at Nicaea has not been preserved in the surviving canons, the Alexandrian method of Paschal calculation—based on the vernal equinox and the full moon, ensuring that the Feast would always follow the Jewish Passover but fall on a Sunday—was upheld and later spread across Christendom.

In the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Paschalion continues to be calculated according to this Alexandrian tradition, and the Resurrection Feast stands at the centre of the liturgical year, preceded by the sacred journey of Great Fast, Holy Week, and the Paschal Rite. As Pope Shenouda III teaches: "The Resurrection is not only a feast—it is the very core of Christian existence. Without it, there is no salvation, no Church, no liturgy."[6]

The Council's decision to establish a unified Paschal observance was a profound act of ecclesial solidarity—one that reminds the faithful of their cosmic unity in the risen Christ.

Yet, even today, the divergence between Eastern and Western calculation of Easter remains a painful wound in the Body of Christ. The Coptic Church, in its dialogue with other traditions, continues to uphold the importance of restoring a common Resurrection Feast as a visible sign of the unity intended by the Council of Nicaea.

Conclusion: Remembering and Recommitting

The 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is a profound moment to remember, reaffirm, and recommit. For the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Council of Nicaea is not simply historical—it is constitutive. It shapes how we understand the identity of Christ, the authority of the Church, and the nature of our witness in the world.

As we participate in the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, we echo the voice of St Athanasius, who defended not an idea, but the living reality of the Incarnate Word: "Let what was confessed at Nicaea stand firm forever, for it is the confession of the Apostles."[7]

Let us, with one heart and one mind, proclaim the Nicene faith—not as a relic of the past, but as the vibrant light of the Church today.

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6. Pope Shenouda III, *Contemplations on the Resurrection*, trans. Aziz Gharbawi (Dar El Tebaa El Kawmia, 1990), 12.

7. St Athanasius, *Apologia Contra Arianos*, Book III.

THE WORLD CONFERENCE AT WORK

The Function of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order

*Andrej Jeftic**

The Faith and Order Secretariat welcomes you to the Sixth World Conference. The conference takes place in Wadi El Natrun over five days. Apart from Sunday, 26 October, the days follow the same rhythm, beginning and concluding with prayer and organized around plenaries, sections, workshops, and business sessions. A special programme on Sunday will introduce the participants to the monastic life of the Wadi El Natrun region.

This resource book offers in-depth material on the conference theme and history of the Commission on Faith and Order, as well as information on the content of the plenary sessions and workshops. An accompanying handbook provides essential information on the schedule and the procedures of this conference. We hope they will serve as helpful tools for participation.

Spiritual Life

Spiritual life will play a central role at the Sixth World Conference. Each day will begin and conclude with prayers in the prayer tent. These daily spiritual practices—scripture reading, singing, and praying—reflect the universal Christian Church's diversity, including both confessional and interconfessional expressions.

Youth and the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute

The conference will provide a space for engaging a new generation of theologians and ecumenists through intergenerational learning, dialogue, the intentional involvement of young delegates, stewards, and participants, and also through the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) taking place at the Conference. Following an initial online phase, GETI's residential segment will host up to 100 participants from 13 to 28 October 2025, facilitating engagement by younger and emerging theologians with pivotal theological issues and the conference theme.

* Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftic is Director of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order.

Plenaries

Plenaries will be held in the morning in the main plenary hall. Each day the plenaries will focus on theological reflection on one of the three key themes of the conference (faith, mission, and unity). The plenaries will include keynote addresses as well as panel discussions, allowing for enriching exchange.

Sections

Sections will be held in the first part of the afternoon, with each section meeting four times over the course of the conference. The sections will be organized around the themes of the three study groups of the conference: "Being Church on the Way to Visible Unity," "Being Human: Discerning Humanity in the Image of God," and "Being Church in and for the World." The reports of the sections will guide the future work of Faith and Order.

Each will include the the participation of the conference delegates and advisors and take up ideas from the plenaries that might be useful for the future work of the study group. In the course of its work, the sections will divide into four subgroups dealing with different sub-themes of the overall topic. Each subgroup will write a report which will be incorporated into the overall report of the study group.

Workshops

Workshops will take place in the second part of Saturday and Monday afternoons. These workshops have been organized by the three Faith and Order study groups, World Council of Churches (WCC) programmes, Christian world communions, and other networks participating in the World Conference. Each workshop will focus on one theme of general interest and will include short presentations, panel discussions, and an opportunity for discussion by conference participants. The workshops offer spaces to churches and partnering organizations to feed into the outcomes of the conference. There will be 12 workshops each day and participants will be asked to indicate their interests in advance. We ask all those who offer workshops to ensure that their working methods allow for the broadest possible participation and inclusion of participants with disabilities.

Business Sessions

Business sessions will take place in the final part of the afternoon in the conference plenary hall. They will focus on receiving and adopting the reports of the sections as well as finalizing the conference message. All participants are welcome at the business sessions, but speaking and involvement in decision

making will be limited to the delegates of the member churches and the members of the Commission on Faith and Order. The moderator may invite persons participating in the conference, such as the staff of Faith and Order, official guests, representatives of world communions, consultants, and other persons to speak.

Decisions will be made by consensus. This is understood as seeking the common mind of the meeting without resort to a formal vote, in a process of genuine dialogue that is respectful, mutually supportive, and empowering, whilst prayerfully seeking to discern God's will. On the final day, a closing plenary will take the place of a business session.

On behalf of the Faith and Order Secretariat, I wish you a blessed stay in Wadi El Natrun.

Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftic
Director of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order

GETI 2025: A PILGRIMAGE OF UNITY AND HOPE IN EGYPT

*Ani Ghazaryan Drissi**

Introduction

In an era of profound and often disorienting global transition, theological education and formation must be prophetic, integrative, and responsive. The Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI) 2025, which will take place in Egypt alongside the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, is a visionary ecumenical formation space that invites deep theological reflection and embodied communion. Hosted at the historic St Bishoy Monastery in Wadi El Natrun—a site revered as one of the oldest centres of Christian monastic life—GETI 2025 will gather emerging theological voices from around the world to live, learn, and journey together in the pursuit of visible unity.

Rather than being an isolated academic event, GETI 2025 is conceived of as a pilgrimage—a collective, embodied search for the unity of the Church, lived across doctrinal, cultural, ecclesial, and generational divides. It offers a liminal space for the formation of a new generation of ecumenical leaders who carry both inherited traditions and prophetic imagination into a rapidly shifting world.

A Living Legacy: The Development and Purpose of GETI

GETI was inaugurated formally in 2013 during the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea. Yet its conceptual and spiritual roots reach deeper, emerging from the earlier youth and theological formation events of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches Assembly in Accra (2004) and the WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre (2006). These gatherings revealed the need for more robust, sustained theological spaces where students, young theologians, and church leaders could engage in ecumenical learning grounded in prayer, praxis, and intercultural exchange.

Following the assembly in Busan, GETI evolved through two subsequent gatherings: alongside the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2018, and during the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe,

* Dr Ani Ghazaryan Drissi is WCC Programme Executive for Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) and Professor of Ecumenical Theology at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland.

Germany, in 2022. Each of these events fostered transformative communities of theological inquiry and spiritual formation. Participants were not simply passive recipients of theological knowledge but co-creators of shared theological space. They came from different Christian traditions, cultures, and academic disciplines, yet were drawn together by a shared commitment to the ecumenical vision of visible unity.

The fundamental purpose of GETI is to cultivate leaders who are theologically grounded in their own traditions, spiritually nourished through worship and prayer, and actively engaged in the ecumenical mission of the Church. It emphasizes ecumenism as a lived experience, one that transcends theory to shape relationships, practices, and institutions.

The Context of Global Crisis and Ecclesial Change

GETI 2025 unfolds amid significant global challenges. Humanity is grappling with climate catastrophe, mass migration, economic injustice, wars, political polarization, and the digital transformation of social life. These realities do not affect only secular spheres; they deeply shape the life, witness, and structure of the Church.

In many places, churches face crises of legitimacy and identity. Attendance is in decline, young people are disengaging, and ecclesial leadership is wrestling with its role in post-Christendom societies. At the same time, in the global South and among diasporic communities, Christianity continues to grow—often in contexts marked by conflict, poverty, and persecution.

The ecumenical movement itself faces both opportunities and obstacles. While interchurch cooperation continues in areas such as *diakonia* and peacebuilding, theological dialogues often struggle to engage emerging realities. There is a need for new paradigms that reflect the complex, interconnected world of the 21st century.

The theme of GETI 2025—"Where Now for Visible Unity?"—asks how the Church can live into its calling as a reconciled and reconciling body in this context of global turbulence. As Konrad Raiser has argued, ecumenism must shift "from unity as a structural goal to unity as a spiritual and ethical vocation."[1]

1. Konrad Raiser, *To Be the Church: Challenges and Hopes for a New Millennium* (WCC Publications, 2001).

Theological Architecture: Revisiting Convergence, Reclaiming Creed

GETI 2025's theological framing draws deeply from the work of the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order, particularly its landmark convergence texts: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) and *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV).[2] These texts have helped clarify and bridge doctrinal differences between churches while offering language for mutual recognition and collaboration.

BEM—often called the Lima Text—offered unprecedented convergence on sacraments and ministry, serving as a springboard for interchurch dialogues globally. Meanwhile, TCTCV attempts to answer the deeper question of what the Church is, grounding unity in trinitarian life and mission. These texts will serve as core readings in GETI 2025, not as static documents but as living theological tools.

A pivotal moment in GETI 2025 will be the commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 CE). This creed, born in the crucible of theological conflict and imperial consolidation, remains a rare ecumenical consensus—a confession shared by Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and many other churches.

Participants will reflect on the Creed not only as a doctrinal text but as a dynamic symbol of faith that continues to bind diverse traditions. How might the Creed be interpreted today in light of ecological despair, secular pluralism, and interreligious complexity? How does it help articulate a vision of unity that is spiritually rich, theologically grounded, and socially responsive?

Three Pilgrimage Paths: Theological Method in Motion

The pedagogical and spiritual framework of GETI 2025 follows three interwoven theological movements drawn from the Christian mystical tradition:

Via Positiva invites participants to affirm the beauty, creativity, and resilience of Christian communities. Through stories of liturgical renewal, ecumenical advocacy, and contextual theologies, participants will explore how unity is expressed in common witness and mission. Theological reflection here is celebratory and constructive, attuned to signs of God's presence.

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2. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (WCC Publications, 1982), https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111; *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111.

Via Negativa opens space for lament, critique, and historical reckoning. Participants will confront the wounds of colonialism, theological elitism, patriarchal structures, and racism. This path aligns with the call to decolonize theological education, articulated by scholars such as Musa Dube and Kwok Pui-lan, who advocate for postcolonial hermeneutics and intersectional epistemologies.[3]

Via Transformativa looks forward with hope and urgency. Participants will wrestle with theological responses to genocide, persecution, poverty, economic injustice, migration, and political and religious extremism. What kind of theology equips the Church to act justly and love mercy in the Anthropocene? Here, unity is reimagined as a praxis of resistance and a sign of God's future.

Together, these three pathways constitute a holistic and dynamic theology-in-motion, drawing on ancient wisdom to address contemporary challenges.

Egypt as Sacred Context: Theological Learning from the Desert

The Egyptian desert has long been a site of spiritual encounter and theological innovation. The Coptic Orthodox Church, one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, preserves a liturgical and theological tradition deeply shaped by the desert fathers and mothers. Its endurance amid marginalization offers profound lessons about resilience, identity, and faith.

St Bishoy Monastery, founded in the 4th century, remains a place of vibrant monastic life. The rhythms of prayer, fasting, and community within this context offer a countercultural witness to a hyper-mediated, commodified world. GETI participants will engage this living tradition not as observers but as guests and pilgrims.

Site visits to local congregations, theological conversations with Egyptian scholars, and shared worship with Coptic clergy will allow participants to experience theology as embodied, situated, and communal. Such immersion challenges abstract theology and grounds learning in lived faith.

A Participatory and Relational Formation Model

The learning environment of GETI 2025 is designed to be dialogical, participatory, and intercultural. It blends academic rigor with spiritual formation, community life, and global solidarity. Participants will engage in lectures, workshops, worship, and small-group reflection, co-creating knowledge across traditions and disciplines.

3. Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Chalice Press, 2000); Pui-lan Kwok, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Pilgrim Press, 2005).

The programme is curated by the WCC's Commission on Ecumenical Education and Formation, in cooperation with the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, regional theological networks, WCC member and non-member churches, and local Egyptian partners. It exemplifies collaborative theological education—a model increasingly recognized as essential for effective leadership formation in pluralistic contexts.[4]

Such a formation process emphasizes relationships over credentials, curiosity over certainty, and hospitality over hierarchy. It seeks to form leaders who can navigate complexity with humility, courage, and hope.

Conclusion: From Ecumenical Reflection to Ecclesial Transformation

GETI 2025 is more than a programme. It is a *kairos* moment in the pilgrimage of the Church—a threshold space where the Holy Spirit invites discernment, healing, and renewed commitment. As participants gather in Egypt, they become part of a long journey that stretches from the early desert monastics to today's digital disciples.

They do not merely ask "Where now for visible unity?", they begin to live the answer. They discover anew that unity is not uniformity, but communion; not achievement, but gift; not theory, but practice.

In a divided and wounded world, GETI 2025 testifies to the enduring promise of ecumenical formation. It reminds us that the Church can be a sign of hope, a servant of justice, and a witness to the reconciling love of Christ.

4. See Michael P. Farrell and Robert H. Smith, *The Collaborative Edge in Education: A New Approach to Leadership and Learning* (Routledge, 2017).

Panelists at the Sixth World Conference

P. Antoine Al Ahmar (Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, The Middle East Council of Churches)

Archimandrite Damaskinos Alazrai (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, Egypt)

Rev. Dr Mercedes Bachmann (United Evangelical Lutheran Church [Argentina-Uruguay], WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Prof. em. Dr Sandra Beardsall (United Church of Canada, Head of Nicaea 2025 steering group, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Prof. Dr Angela Berlis (Old Catholic Church, University of Bern, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Dr Michael Blair (United Church of Canada, Moderator of WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism)

Rev. Dr Sotiris Boukis (Evangelical Church of Greece, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Prof. Dr Athanasios Despotis (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Bonn University)

Rev. Prof. Dr Stephanie Dietrich (Lutheran Church of Norway, Moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Dr Susan Durber (United Reformed Church, WCC President for Europe)

Dr Mano Emmanuel (World Evangelical Alliance, Colombo Theological Seminary, Sri Lanka)

Prof. Dr Tamara Grdzelidze (Orthodox Church of Georgia, Ilia State University Tblissi)

Rev. Prof. Dr Jacqueline Grey (Australian Christian Churches, Australasian Christian Studies Centre)

Rev. Prebendary Dr Isabelle Hamley (Church of England, Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge)

H. G. Anba Hermina (General Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Church, Egypt)

Very Rev. Bishop em. Antje Jackelén (Church of Sweden, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftic (World Council of Churches, Director of the Commission on Faith and Order)

H. E. Metropolitan Job of Pisidia (Getcha) (Ecumenical Patriarchate, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Dr Jacob Joseph (Syrian Orthodox Church)

Dr Mutale Mulenga Kaunda (Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies)

Rev. Kendrick Kemp (American Baptist Churches in the USA)

H.E. Dr theol. habil. Kardinal Kurt Koch (President of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, Roman Catholic Church)

Rev. Dr Felipe Gustavo Koch Butelli (Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

H. G. Bishop Dr Kyrillos (Coptic Orthodox Church)

Rev. Dr Septemmy Lakawa (Protestant Church in South-East Sulawesi)

Dr Victor Lee (Assembly of God Church, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Prof. Dr Bryan Lobo (Roman Catholic Church, Pontifical Gregorian University Rome)

Rev. Jackline Makena (Methodist Church in Kenya, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Canon Prof. Dr Charlotte Methuen (Scottish Episcopal Church, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Dr Maria Munkholt Christensen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba (Programme Director for Unity, Mission, and Ecumenical Formation, World Council of Churches)

Rev. Prof. Dr Rima Nasrallah (Academic Dean of the Near East School of Theology, Lebanon)

Dr Johannes Oeldemann (Roman Catholic Church, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Ms Suk Yi Pang (Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China, WCC Commission on Ecumenical Education and Formation)

Dr Tijana Petkovic Bertsch (Serbian Orthodox Church, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay (General Secretary, World Council of Churches)

Rev. Dr Teddy Sakupapa (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, University of Western Cape)

Rev. Tara Tautari (Methodist Church of New Zealand)

Fr. Dr. Karam Shamasha (Provost of the Catholic University in Erbil, Iraq)

His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark (Coptic Orthodox Church)

His Beatitude Theodore II, Pope and Patriarch of the See of Alexandria and all Egypt (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Egypt)

Very Rev. Dr Evangelos Thiani (Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria)

Rev. Dr Carlton Turner (Church in the Province of West Indies, WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

Prof. Dr Susan Wood (Roman Catholic Church, Toronto School of Theology)

Prof. Dr Miroslav Volf (Episcopal Church USA / Evangelical Church in Croatia; Yale Centre for Faith and Culture)

Opening Plenary (Friday, 24 October, 09:00–10:30)

The opening plenary will welcome participants and officially open the conference. The orientation will recap the historical, thematic, institutional, and contextual journey from the 5th World Conference—which met under the theme of "Toward Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness"—to this conference and its theme, "Where now for Visible Unity." The conference theme of the conference will also be considered in light of the WCC 2023–30 strategic period in which the work of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order is located.

Welcoming addresses from representatives of Faith and Order, the WCC leadership, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and member churches in Egypt.

Where Now for Visible Unity? (Friday, 24 October, 11:00-12:30)

This plenary will explore the theme of visible unity within the ecumenical movement, examining its historical development, contemporary challenges, and future aspirations. Through an in-depth look at the history of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, the commemoration of Nicaea, and current ecumenical endeavours, this session aims to provide a foundation for discussions throughout the conference.

Reflections from Faith and Order on the theme of the World Conference.

Faith in the Middle East (Friday, 24 October, 16:30–18:00)

This plenary session will explore the theme of Christian faith in the Middle East, highlighting the region's rich historical contributions to Christianity and the ongoing challenges faced by its communities. Organized in collaboration with the Coptic Orthodox Church and other host churches, the session aims to deepen understanding of the lived faith in this context, drawing attention to both the enduring witness and the current struggles of Middle Eastern Christians.

Speakers:

- H. G. Anba Hermina (General Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Church, Egypt)

- Archimandrite Damaskinos Alazrai (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, Egypt)
- Rev. Prof. Dr Rima Nasrallah (Academic Dean of the Near East School of Theology, Lebanon)
- Fr. Dr. Karam Shamasha (Provost of the Catholic University in Erbil, Iraq)

Moderator:

- P. Antoine Al Ahmar (Director of the Theological and Ecumenical Department, The Middle East Council of Churches)

The Triune God and the Identity of the Church (Saturday, 25 October, 09:00–10:30)

This plenary session will explore the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith regarding the nature of the triune God and its profound implications for the identity of the Church. Rooted in biblical teachings and theological traditions, the session will delve into trinitarian theology as it shapes the understanding of the Church's nature, purpose, and mission. How has the Council of Nicaea helped to preserve the apostolic faith and the unity of the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic? How does the doctrine of the triune God inform our understanding of the Church's identity? The plenary will build upon previous Faith and Order work, drawing upon themes such as trinitarian theology, Christology, ecclesiology, apostolicity of faith, confession of one faith, baptism, and the role of the Creed within the context of risrristianity.

Keynote Speakers:

- Very Rev. Archbishop em. Antje Jackelén (Church of Sweden)
- H.E. Dr theol. habil. Kardinal Kurt Koch (Roman Catholic Church)
- H. G. Bishop Dr Kyrillos (Coptic Orthodox Church)

Moderators:

- Dr Maria Munkholt Christensen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Rev. Dr Sotiris Boukis (Evangelical Church of Greece, Commission on Faith and Order)

Unpacking Apostolic Faith—Living the Nicene Creed in Context (Saturday, 25 October, 11:00–12:30)

This panel discussion addresses multifaceted themes surrounding the apostolic faith, particularly as articulated through the Nicene Creed, drawing upon insights from Faith and Order publications. By examining various dimensions such as incarnation, theological anthropology, contextual theology, and ethical implications, the session aims to unpack the richness of the apostolic faith and its relevance in diverse contemporary contexts. Through dialogue and reflection, participants will explore how the Creed shapes our understanding of faith, community, and mission in today's world. How does our understanding of apostolic faith inform our interpretation and application of the theological themes embedded within the Nicene Creed? How can a deeper appreciation of apostolic faith foster unity and collaboration among diverse Christian traditions, reflecting the Creed's call to confess one faith? In what ways does the Creed's confession of apostolic faith guide our engagement, mission, and witness with contemporary issues (Christian plurality and broadening the table; social, contextual, and ethical issues; religious pluralism)?

Panelists:

- Rev Prof. em. Dr Sandra Beardsall (United Church of Canada)
- Prof. Dr Tamara Grdzelidze (Orthodox Church of Georgia)
- Dr Victor Lee (Assembly of God Church, Malaysia)
- Dr Mutale Mulenga Kaunda (Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies)
- Prof. Dr Miroslav Volf (Episcopal Church USA / Evangelical Church in Croatia, Yale Centre for Faith and Culture)

Moderator:

- Rev. Dr Mercedes Bachmann (United Evangelical Lutheran Church [Argentina-Uruguay], WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

The Church in and for the World (Monday, 27 October, 09:00–10:30)

This session builds upon the preceding Faith and Order efforts to conceptualize mission in relation to the nature of the Church, engaging with the vision of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of mission characterized by transforming discipleship and mission from the margins. To achieve this, the session will tackle several pivotal questions: How do we live out

the apostolic faith in our mission today? In what ways can the model of triune love shape our mission? How can we promote unity through our witness and service to the world? Lastly, how do decolonial perspectives on mission shape and define the nature of the Church as it exists in and for the world?

Keynote Speakers:

- Rev. Dr Septemmy Lakawa (Protestant Church in South-East Sulawesi)
- Very Rev. Dr Evangelos Thiani (Eastern Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria)
- Rev. Dr Carlton Turner (Church in the Province of West Indies)

Moderators:

- Rev. Prebendary Dr Isabelle Hamley (Church of England, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Rev. Jackline Makena (Methodist Church in Kenya, Commission on Faith and Order)

Mission—Common Witness and Apostolic Discipleship (Monday, 27 October 11:00–12:30)

The session explores the relationship between Church unity and practicing the apostolic faith, framed by God's mission (*missio Dei*) in the world. It aims to understand how the mission of God's love informs the Church's purpose and function and how to relate structural unity to unity in mission, witness, and service to the world. Panelists will debate the mission of the Church in today's world, underlining its significance in addressing contemporary issues such as the climate crisis and the call for an inclusive community that challenges power structures and resists colonial legacies. The conversation will critically examine how we understand Church identity in relation to the models of mission from the margins and transforming discipleship. How does this vision of mission affect our ecclesiologies and the search for visible unity? How can we engage with Indigenous spiritualities and theologies in our search for doctrinal agreements? What does living the apostolic faith mean within an inclusive community that makes space for people's different abilities?

The conversation will also bring forth the question of the Church's prophetic presence in and service to the world. How are acts of speaking truth to power and opposing colonialism integral to proclaiming the kingdom of God? How can we bear witness to the transformations promised by God today? How can we fulfill God's mission amid the climate emergency? How do we interpret

the nature of the Church, worship, and mission, as implied in the concept of "liturgy after liturgy"? Finally, how can the Council of Nicaea inspire us to rethink how to participate in God's mission in today's world?

Panelists:

- Rev. Rebecka Folkesten (Church of Sweden)
- Rev. Dr Jacob Joseph (Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East)
- Rev. Kendrick Kemp (American Baptist Churches in the USA)
- Rev Dr Felipe Gustavo Koch Butelli (Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil)
- Rev. Prof. Dr Bryan Lobo (Roman Catholic Church)
- Rev. Tara Tautari (Methodist Church of New Zealand)

Moderator:

- Rev. Dr Michael Blair (United Church of Canada, Moderator, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism)

Unity—Living and Visible? (Tuesday, 28 October, 09:00–10:30)

The pursuit of unity has been a constant ideal of the ecumenical movement. Over the years, this concept of unity has been defined and addressed in various ways by different bodies. The commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea offers us another moment in time to reflect and elaborate on how unity is both understood and practiced in today's world. Given the significance of the observance of this first ecumenical council, this session will explore the various models of unity that have been practised; examine how we can delve more deeply into the relevance of the concept of unity among churches in light of today's fractured and conflict-ridden world; analyze how the Nicene Creed facilitates and engenders doctrinal unity while also acknowledging that for some traditions it has been a source of Christian division; propose how new and viable models of unity when practised can concretely contribute to the attainment of the goal of visible unity.

Unity has traditionally been one of the core pillars of the work and witness of the Commission on Faith and Order . This session seeks to consolidate and build on the achievements of the past, while at the same time formulating a formidable vision for the future. To achieve this, the following questions are central to the success of the session: How enthusiastic are the churches in the quest for visible unity? Is unity only unity if it is visible— that is, is visible unity the only feasible

model? What is meant by visible unity? How might conciliarity and synodality help to foster the work and witness toward visible unity? How is the concept and pursuit of unity being undermined by current social and political global trends where territorialism has been normalized? In the pilgrimage of unity, what is the destination and how is that determined and by whom? Lastly, in what ways can the acceptance of the Council of Nicaea contribute to the realization of Christian unity both locally and globally and how by extension can it generate an ethos of living and visible unity in our world?

Keynote speakers:

- Rev Prof. Dr Jacqueline Grey (Australian Christian Churches)
- H. E. Metropolitan Job of Pisidia (Ecumenical Patriarchate)
- Prof. Dr Susan Wood (Toronto School of Theology)

Moderators:

- Prof. Dr Angela Berlis (Old Catholic Church, Commission on Faith and Order)
- Dr Tijana Petkovic Bertsch (Serbian Orthodox Church, Commission on Faith and Order)

Living Visible Unity (Tuesday, 28 October, 11:00–12:30)

The core question of the Sixth World Conference is "Where now for visible unity?" With this in mind, this session seeks to provide some concrete examples of how the ideal and goal of visible unity has been realized. This is not to indicate that the process is complete. Rather, this session will seek to highlight how visible unity is "on the way." As such, the aim of this session is to point to indicators of visible models of unity that can inspire us. As we give attention to these signs of unity, we will reflect on how the fundamental elements that have resulted in these lived and concrete examples of Christian unity can be duplicated and multiplied. This session will explore how a broadened table can fortify the common witness of Christians who can prophetically discern the signs of the times and speak with one voice to a fractured and broken world. Throughout the modern ecumenical movement, varied patterns of this model of unity have emerged among different Christian confessions. As people live, work, pray, and witness in living communities, they serve as a mirror and laboratory which reflects and reveal the ideals of the goal of visible unity.

These questions will be key to this session: How do these lived communities serve as both sign and symbol of Christian unity? How can these communities contribute to Christian formation in which the ideals of Christian unity are

inculcated in one's spiritual orientation? What are the real and existential threats that can undermine and discourage the goal of living the visible unity? What advantages, both locally and globally, can be realized as Christians seek to live the visible unity, joining their collective voices in a strong common witness in today's world? Lastly, how can living visible unity be "pilgrim stations" that serve as lighthouses guiding us in the fulfillment of our Lord's prayer that "all [may] be one?" (John 17: 21)

Panelists:

- Prof. Dr Athanasios Despotis (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Bonn University)
- Dr Mano Emmanuel (World Evangelical Alliance)
- Rev. Canon Prof. Dr Charlotte Methuen (Scottish Episcopal Church)
- Ms Suk Yi Pang (Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China)
- Rev. Dr Teddy Sakupapa (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, University of Western Cape)

Moderator:

- Dr Johannes Oeldemann (Roman Catholic Church, Commission on Faith and Order)

Ecumenical Future (Tuesday, 28 October, 16:00–17:30)

This closing plenary aims to envision the future of ecumenism in the 21st century, addressing key challenges and opportunities for the Commission on Faith and Order and the broader ecumenical movement. This session will consider new paradigms, challenges in Christian witness, and aspirations for unity, justice, and reconciliation in a rapidly changing global context.

Speakers:

- Youth representatives and established ecumenical leaders

Closing Plenary (Tuesday, 28 October, 17:45–18:30)

Soon after the Ecumenical Future plenary, the Closing Plenary will gather the insights of that session in a ceremonial, sending-off charge that will echo the content of the whole conference and anticipate the journey ahead: *Where to now for visible unity?*

Speakers:

- Representatives of host churches, representatives of World Council of Churches, guests from world communions

Workshops W01–W12 (Saturday, 25 October, 16:30–17:30)

W01: Towards a Common Date for Easter

Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 1

In the synodal letter after the First Council of Nicaea in 325 it was stated that Easter should be celebrated jointly on the Sunday following the first vernal full moon. When calculating the date, the best available astronomical knowledge should be used. In 2025, Easter was celebrated on the same day in Eastern and Western churches. The 1700th anniversary gives an additional reason to ecumenically revisit the old dispute between churches in the East and in the West regarding the exact date of Easter. From the perspective of joint witness, a future joint date would be beneficial. Could we overcome the challenges to setting a permanent common date? Our task now is to frame a joint process toward that aim.

W02: Previous Faith and Order Work on Moral Discernment (History, Tool, and Reception)

Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 2

This workshop will explore recent Faith and Order work on moral discernment and disagreement in and between churches. Its focus will be on four documents that examine the influences on moral discernment, the way different traditions approach moral discernment, historical cases of moral discernment by churches, and a tool to promote dialogue and build *koinonia* on matters of moral discernment. The workshop will also look at how these have been used in practice.

W03: Decolonizing Ecumenical Methodologies—Reimagining Unity Through Local Epistemologies

Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 3

This 60-minute workshop invites participants to critically examine the epistemological foundations of ecumenical theology and practice. Historically, ecumenical reflection has often privileged Eurocentric frameworks, marginalizing the theologies and methods of communities shaped by colonial histories and Indigenous worldviews. As we gather from diverse ecclesial and cultural contexts

during this landmark anniversary year, the workshop offers space to reimagine the Church's unity through the lens of local theological reasoning. Participants will be introduced to decolonial and Indigenous theological methods—not as supplementary perspectives, but as foundational to a renewed ecumenical methodology. The aim is not just inclusion, but methodological transformation.

W04: The Nicene Creed — A Renewed Call to Unity

Led by WCC General Secretary Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, in collaboration with representatives of Christian world communions.

The Council of Nicaea and its creed inspire us to seek a unity which is both founded on theological understanding and agreement and at the same time concretely and recognizably reflecting the oneness of the body of Christ. Together with representatives of the World Communions, we want to discuss in this workshop how the Nicene Creed can serve as a testimony to our living faith and unity in a divided world today. How can Nicaea inspire us to present the message of Christ in a way that is both bold and compassionate, recognizing the value of dialogue and mutual understanding?

W05: The Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity and Its Theological Roots in Faith and Order—How Do Theological Reflection and Faith-Driven Action Relate?

Organized by Rev. Dr HyoJin Kim, Coordinator for the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity, World Council of Churches

The Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity (PRJU) represents a transformative journey of faith and action. It seeks to embody justice, healing, and visible unity among communities worldwide. As part of the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order, this workshop aims to deepen theological understanding and practical application of PRJU, rooted in the core themes of faith, mission, and unity. This workshop not only introduces practical methodologies but also strengthens theological reflection that supports the Faith and Order framework. PRJU is not mere activism, but a transformative journey deeply rooted in theological understanding and faith-driven action. It bridges practical engagement with profound theological concepts, offering a pathway to visible unity that reflects the heart of Faith and Order's mission.

W06: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, Racism and the Dismantling of Patriarchy

Organized by the Programmes on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches

At the Council of Nicaea, Black African bishops participated without question, while women were sidelined despite the Council's implicit affirmation of Mary's role in the incarnation. This workshop explores these contradictions and opportunities for justice today. Drawing from WCC archives—including the landmark documents *Sexism in the 1970s* (1974) and *Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism*, we ask:

- Why do racism, casteism, and patriarchy persist despite decades of ecclesial engagement?
- How might the theological vision of the Council of Nicaea (e.g., the full humanity and divinity of Christ) support radical inclusion?
- What prophetic actions can churches take to dismantle exclusion and build inclusive communities of faith?

W07: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, Healing, and Communal Transformation

Organized by the programme on Life, Justice and Peace of the World Council of Churches

The bishops at Nicaea bore scars—physical and spiritual—from imperial persecution. Their coming together modeled a profound form of resilient unity. This workshop explores how the Church can be a healing presence in wounded societies today. It will:

- Reflect on the role of doctrinal unity in communal healing after violence.
- Examine intergenerational and structural trauma—from colonialism to contemporary conflict—and healing practices rooted in lament, liturgy, and reconciliation.
- Draw insights from global models (e.g., South Africa, Colombia) to guide churches in facilitating societal healing.

W08: Indigenous Peoples in the WCC

Organized by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism

Facilitator: Mikenzie Ling

This workshop will present a global Indigenous response to the conference's overarching themes of '*Where now for visible unity?*' and '*Living the apostolic faith today*'. The Ecumenical Indigeneous Peoples Network (EIPN) of WCC, alongside several supplementary voices from First Nations (of so-called Australia) and Pasifika ecumenical communities, seeks to amplify Indigenous commentaries, critiques and contributions within our global ecumenical movement as it gathers to mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. A small panel from the EIPN will share around the intersections of faith, unity, and mission from the diverse-yet-unified perspectives and rich wisdoms of their Indigenous cultures and communities.

W09: Unbelievable? – Witness to the Faith of Nicaea from a Contemporary Perspective

Organized by the Joint Working group between the WCC and the Catholic Church.

Facilitator: Prof. Dr Annemarie C. Mayer (Chair of Dogmatics and History of Dogma, Theological Faculty of Trier, Germany) and Rev. Dr Kuzipa Nalwamba (World Council of Churches)

As the oldest bilateral dialogue group between the WCC and the Catholic Church, the Joint Working Group has addressed the topic of common witness to the apostolic faith several times in its 60-year history. However, it is a topic that never loses its relevance. On the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, it is particularly important to ask: what do we believe when we profess this creed? Has it not become unbelievable in the modern world? Is the fact that Jesus was a religious genius, a charismatic preacher who continues to inspire people today not more appealing to most of our contemporaries than confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God? Have Arius and his ideas ultimately prevailed? How can we Christians respond convincingly to the question that Jesus asked, and which is asked of us today by members of other religions and, above all, by people who no longer belong to any religion: 'Who do you say that Jesus of Nazareth is?' This workshop sketches out what bearing witness to the faith of Nicaea might look like today.

W10: Welcoming the Stranger in a Time of Anger and Anxiety

Organized on behalf of the World Council of Churches.

Facilitator: Rev. Nathan Day Wilson

Anger and anxiety define the tenor and tone of our shared life these days. Anger about the present; anxiety about the future. Politicians, some religious leaders, and others play on these defining characteristics to provoke fear—namely, fear of the unknown future and fear of the unknown person. Jesus points out that when we welcome the stranger, we are welcoming Christ himself (see Matt. 25:45; 8:19). How, in this time, can we live this call? This interactive presentation will propose three concrete aspects of the call to welcome others, whether they are strange to us or not! In the end, we will see how doing so can create a future that is better than the present.

W12: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, the Climate Emergency, and the Integrity of Creation

Organized by the Programmes on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches

This workshop reimagines Nicaea as a Kairos moment for ecological repentance. The climate crisis—driven by extractive economies and sustained by indifference—violates creation and the lives of the most vulnerable. Grounded in the Nicene Creed's affirmation of God as "Maker of heaven and earth," the session will:

Engage Indigenous and marginalized eco-theologies that centre the sacred interconnectedness of land, water, and life.

Examine how the commodification of nature undermines justice and creation's integrity.

Explore how Churches can lead in the Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice (2025–2034), translating theological hope into community-based ecological action.

Workshops W013–W24 (Monday October 27, 16:30–17:30)

W13: Breathing Together—Synodal Discernment and Christian Witness in a World of Growing Polarization

Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 1

In the development of the ecumenical movement since the 20th century, we have become aware that our faith in a triune God leads us to the recognition of the need for living as being-in-relationship. In light of past and present processes of Synodal discernment, this workshop will ask what manifestations of unity are conceivable to make the living fellowship more tangible. Common witness, common worship, and common service to those who are marginalized are important fields of ecumenical engagement, leading toward a holistic understanding of ecumenism. In an era of growing polarization, when Christians "breathe together" in unity, they become a witness of peace to the whole world.

W14: Theological Responses to Violence (from Domestic Violence to Wars)

Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 2

This workshop will address the moral issue of violence in our contemporary world, focusing on domestic violence and war/global violence. The workshop aims to provide biblical and theological resources to affirm the dignity and value of all people and to counter violence in our world today. It will include a mix of round-table discussions, presentations, and reflection on the legacy of Nicaea for addressing contemporary moral issues. One possible way of relating these moral issues with the legacy of the Council of Nicea could be to explore the regulative function that the symbol of Nicea plays in Christian doctrine and to ask what would be the ethical counterpart of Nicea's "grammar of faith." Exploring the relation between the Golden Rule and "seeing the face of Christ in others" would be a possible answer, it seems to me. I am not sure this suggestion is of any help and I am not even sure it is "legit" for me make it, since I am actually in the other subgroup, but I mention it just in case it could be useful to your subgroup in one way or another.

W15: The Use and Inculturation of the Nicene Creed Across Diverse Traditions

Organized by the Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 3

This 60-minute workshop will explore how the Nicene Creed has been received, adapted, and embodied across different cultural and liturgical traditions. While the Creed has historically unified Christian communities in its confession of faith in the triune God, its expression in language, gesture, music, and symbol

has reflected the diversity of the Church's local realities. Through theological reflection and practical case studies, the session will explore how inculturation both preserves the theological core of the Creed and makes it accessible to new generations and cultures. Participants will encounter diverse ways in which the Creed has been sung, prayed, translated, and performed—from Eastern and Western traditions to contextual adaptations in Africa, Asia, and Indigenous communities. By reflecting on the creative tension between faithfulness and contextualisation, this workshop invites participants to explore how the Creed can continue to foster both communion and creativity in ecumenical worship, formation, and witness.

WS16: A Way of Togetherness: A Joint Consultative Group (JCG) Ecumenical Model

Facilitated by: Join Consultative Group

In this workshop, we will explore the theoretical methodology guiding the Joint Consultative Group for Dialogue between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF) (JCG) over the past three cycles. Sharing and listening are at the core of the JCG's experience of unity as togetherness. Through this workshop, we will share stories about ways the Holy Spirit has ministered to us through encounters with people outside of our traditions.

W17: Nicaea 2025—Exploring the Council`s Ecumenical Significance Today

Book Launch: Proceedings of the Conference at Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, 4-8 November 2024. Presentations by Rev. Prof. Dr Octavian Mihoc, Prof. Dr Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, Prof. Dr Andrej Jeftić.

W18: Nicaea 325–2025—Intra-Christian and Interreligious Dialogue on a Pilgrimage Toward Peace

Organized by the Interreligious Desk, Prof. Dr Angeliki Ziaka, World Council of Churches

Marking 1700 years since the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, this workshop explores how the shared experiences of the Christian churches can open a space for dialogue, within the fellowship of churches and in encounters with interreligious counterparts, on a common pilgrimage toward justice, reconciliation, and peace.

W19: Revisiting The Church: Towards a Common Vision in Light of The Gift of Being

Organized on behalf of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) by Rev. Dr Arne Fritzson

In this workshop we compare two documents from The World Council of Churches: *The Church Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper No. 214) and *The Gift of Being* that was prepared by a joint venture of Faith and Order and the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) and presented to the central committee of the World Council of Churches 2016. We explore how the concerns of persons with disabilities can be understood as ecumenical issues and related to the ecumenical movement's quest for visual unity of the churches. Is the fact that in many cases persons with disabilities feel excluded from the lives of the churches a division within the Church, the body of Christ, that needs to be healed?

W20: Integrity of Confession—Nicaea, the Climate Emergency, and the Integrity of Creation

Organized by the Programmes on Life, Justice, and Peace of the World Council of Churches

This workshop reimagines Nicaea as a Kairos moment for ecological repentance. The climate crisis—driven by extractive economies and sustained by indifference—violates creation and the lives of the most vulnerable. Grounded in the Nicene Creed's affirmation of God as "Maker of heaven and earth," the session will:

- Engage Indigenous and marginalized eco-theologies that centre the sacred interconnectedness of land, water, and life.
- Examine how the commodification of nature undermines justice and creation's integrity.
- Explore how Churches can lead in the Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice (2025–2034), translating theological hope into community-based ecological action.

W21: Theological Anthropology, Science, and Technology

Workshop organized by Commission on Faith and Order, Study Group 2

In an age increasingly shaped by digital presence, the Christian understanding of the Incarnation—God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ—challenges us to reflect on what it means to be truly human in both physical and virtual spaces. As embodied beings formed from the dust (Genesis 2:7) and made in the image of God, our humanity carries sacred weight, yet today we extend ourselves into digital realms where presence, prayer, and community take on new forms. This workshop explores how digital spirituality, human identity, and our relationship with the cosmos are being challenged by technology. Are online liturgies and prayers genuine encounters with the divine? How does digital life affect our sense of self and responsibility toward others? And does our growing digital footprint deepen or diminish our role as stewards of creation? Rooted in incarnational theology, we seek to discern how to live faithfully and responsibly as humans—embodied and digital—in a world that God has called good.

Documentary History of Faith and Order

The final section of this resource book examines three central aspects of the theological development of the work of the Commission on Faith and Order. In the first contribution, commission member Prof. Dr Angela Berlis looks at the conferences of 1920 and 1927, introducing the beginnings of the Faith and Order movement. In the second contribution, Dr Stephen G. Brown, editor of *The Ecumenical Review*, offers a documentary history of Faith and Order that builds a bridge from the conclusion of the Fifth World Conference to the current work of the commission. In the third contribution, Rev. Jane Stranz, a minister of the United Reformed Church and of the United Protestant Church of France who was coordinator of the WCC language Service from 2002 to 2011, examines the development of hermeneutics, focusing in particular on the 1998 Faith and Order paper *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics*.

These three articles supplement the existing documentation, which can be accessed online:

- *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963* (Bethany Press 1963), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.241
- *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963–1993*, Faith and Order Paper No. 159 (WCC Publications, 1993), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.166.
- *Lausanne 1927 to Santiago de Compostela 1993: The Faith and Order World Conferences and Issues and Results of the Working Period 1963–1993*, Faith and Order Paper No. 160 (WCC Publications, 1993), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.167.
- Odair Pedroso Mateus, "Faith and Order from Lausanne 1927 to Nicaea 2025: A Century of World Conferences on Faith and Order," *The Ecumenical Review* 75, no. 2 (April 2023): 154–71, https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12788. An extended free online version is available at https://www.academia.edu/115807664/Faith_and_Order_from_Lausanne1927_to_Nicaea2025_A_Century_of_World_Conferences. (Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus is the former director of the Commission on Faith and Order.)

THE FAITH AND ORDER MOVEMENT – MILESTONES IN ITS DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE IN GENEVA (1920) TO THE FIRST WORLD CONFERENCE IN LAUSANNE (1927)

*Angela Berlis**

The beginning of the modern worldwide ecumenical movement is usually associated with the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910.[1] However, the ecumenical movement of the 20th century did not come out of nowhere. In earlier centuries, there had already been efforts aimed at "reunification" or "union." It was not only men but also women who initiated and developed such initiatives. Milestones in the 19th century include the so-called Erfurt Conference in 1860, which took the form of discussions between Catholics and Protestants; and the Bonn Union Conferences, convened by Ignaz von Döllinger in 1874 and 1875, in which Old Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants, and Orthodox participated. The idea of a general prayer for the unity of the Church found expression in the 19th century in a worldwide prayer association and "Psalm league" ("Psalmenbund") associated with the journal *Ut Omnes Unum. The youth movement, including the YMCA and YWCA, founded in the 19th century in the United States and soon established elsewhere, also contributed to the strengthening of the idea of unity. Some members of the interdenominational Student Christian Movement also played an important role in the emerging Ecumenical Movement of the early 20th century.*[2]

* Revd Prof. Dr. Angela Berlis is Professor of Old Catholic History and General Church History at the University of Bern. She has been a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches since 2008 and is a member of the 2025 Nicaea Steering Group. She acknowledges Prof. Charlotte Methuen (Glasgow) and Johnson M. John (Bern) for their support.

1. The following remarks draw on archival material from the archives of the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland [= BABe], Adolf Küry Papers. On the history of the ecumenical movement, see Geoffrey Wainwright and Paul McPartlan (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); in particular Geoffrey Wainwright, "Faith and Order," 377-386; Dagmar Heller, "World Council of Churches," in 387-395. On the early history of Faith and Order, see also Odair Mateus Pedroso, Faith and Order 1920. The Life and Times of an Ecumenical Conference, incomplete manuscript, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/35566671/Faith_and_Order_1920_The_Life_and_Times_of_an_Ecumenical_Conference; Angela Berlis, "'Disrupted ecclesial internationality': The Old Catholic Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift during the First World War," Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte / Contemporary Church History 31 (2018), 146–168.

2. See for this Judith Becker and L. Dana Robert (eds.), *Nationalism and Internationalis in the Young Ecumenical Movement 1895-1920s* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2025).

Moreover, during the preparations for the 1910 Edinburgh conference, it was recognized how important it would be not only to involve evangelical or low-church representatives but also to broaden the circle by involving high-church missionary societies such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) of the Church of England.

The modern ecumenical movement since 1900

The modern ecumenical movement emerged through a series of initiatives, in which individuals, magazines, associations, and churches played a crucial role as connecting links. Canadian-born Charles Henry Brent[1] of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the USA (PECUSA), then missionary bishop in the Philippines, spoke in Edinburgh in 1910 about the new vision of a united church. He subsequently reported to the General Convention of the PECUSA in October 1910 on the World Missionary Conference, arguing that differences about faith and order should be discussed openly and honestly at a world conference. The Convention passed a resolution to appoint a commission dedicated to the goal

> to bring about a Conference for the consideration of questions touching Faith and Order, and that all Christian Communions throughout the world which confess Our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour be asked to unite with us in arranging for and conducting such a conference.[2]

The Bishop of Chicago, Charles Palmerston Anderson, was appointed chairman of the commission, and the lawyer and layman, Robert Hallowell Gardiner III, was appointed secretary. Gardiner became the driving force behind the enterprise, and many considered him "the soul of the conference."[3] He was involved in a network of correspondence with laypeople and church leaders from various churches, which soon spread worldwide. The commission wrote to churches within the United States and on other continents, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht,

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1. On Brent, see: Michael Snape, "Anglicanism and Interventionism: Bishop Brent, the United States, and the British Empire in the First World War," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History 69 (2018) 300-325.*

2. Quoted from Tissington Tatlow, "History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1910-1948," Revised First Draft, December 1951, Manuscript, p. 4, *BABe, AI 29* (file "Geschichte der Ökumenischen Bewegung").

3. Ernst Gaugler refers to a friend who told him this; I assume that this friend was either Eduard Herzog or Adolf Küry, since both knew Gardiner well and corresponded with him. See Ernst Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz über Glauben und Verfassung. Lausanne, 3. – 21. August 1927," *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* [= *IKZ*] 17:4 (1927), 217-28. On the correspondence between Herzog and Gardiner, see: "Zur Weltkonferenz über Glauben und Verfassung in Lausanne," *IKZ* 17 (1927) 129-135.

the Orthodox Churches, and the Church of England; it also sent delegations to Britain and Ireland.

The churches were asked to form commissions to explore questions of faith and order and to support the idea of a World Conference on Faith and Order. One national conference, involving fifteen churches in the USA, was held in New York on 8 May 1913. Gardiner reported that 7580 people worldwide were already receiving information about the movement via a mailing list. At that time, principles were agreed upon for a world conference that still pertain today: The world conference should consider not only "points of difference and agreement between Christians, but also the values of the various approximations to belief characteristics of the several churches." The task of the commissions was not "to force any particular scheme of unity," but "to promote the holding of such a conference." It also became apparent at that time that for people like Gardiner, organic unity was regarded as an ideal, although, as was soon to become clear, this objective was not without controversy. Decisions were also made on how to prepare efficiently for a world conference: questions were to be formulated in advance by the support committees of the individual churches or by "competent men representative of various schools of thought."

1914–1920: A world is changing

From 1914 onwards, further delegations from PECUSA visited Presbyterian and Free Churches in the British Isles. Due to the outbreak of the First World War, visits already planned for the European continent and the Middle East had to be postponed until after the war. At the beginning of August 1914, the founding meeting of the World Alliance of Churches for Promoting International Friendship (from 1920 known as the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches) took place in Constance (Germany) with approximately eighty leaders of European and US churches. Gardiner and other important pioneers of the ecumenical movement also participated in the conference, which was attended by fewer participants than expected and had to be shortened due to German mobilization and the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, this meeting was important: many future leaders of the ecumenical movement met for the first time in Constance and built relationships of trust, forming deep, lasting friendships.

During the war, international cooperation became more difficult. Exchanges continued in writing—in English, Latin, French, Italian, Greek, Russian, or German—between the Faith and Order movement and representatives of the Vatican, the Holy Synod in Russia, and many other churches and individuals. Two European journals played a leading role in disseminating information about the plans for a world conference: *Die Eiche. Vierteljahresschrift für Freundschaftsarbeit der Kirchen,* edited by Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze in

Germany, and the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, published by the (Old) Catholic Faculty of Theology in Bern.[4]

The USA did not enter the war until 1917, and there the work of preparation continued, also through meetings and conferences. In January 1916, a conference bringing together sixty-three participants from fifteen churches determined the themes a world conference should consider "The church, its nature and functions," "The Catholic Creeds," "Grace and the Sacraments in general," "The Ministry, its nature and functions," and finally "Practical questions connected with the missionary and other administrative functions of the Church."

After the First World War, the PECUSA Commission resumed the visits that had been planned before the war. These took the commissioners to Athens and Constantinople, to Rome, Alexandria, and Cairo, and to Jerusalem and Damascus. While Pope Benedict XV in Rome stated that he "by no means wishes to disapprove of the Congress in question," he ruled out the participation of the Roman Catholic Church in the world conference; in contrast, the Coptic Pope in Cairo agreed to his church's participation. A delegation from the commission also visited Scandinavia, but it was not possible to enter Russia and Germany due to the restrictions.[5]

The Old World was undergoing a period of comprehensive and rapid political upheaval during this time. During and after the First World War, several powerful empires came to an end, including the Russian Empire, the Habsburg Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. New forms of communist or democratic government and reconstituted nation-states began to emerge. In this situation of change, movements for ecclesial rapprochement and reconciliation evoked mixed reactions, ranging from hesitant to supportive. In Germany, the Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchenausschuss had reservations about PECUSA's initiative towards establishing a Faith and Order movement, initially viewing it critically as an "Anglican imperialist move." In 1920, the Anglican bishops at the Lambeth Conference and the Patriarchate of Constantinople both issued fundamental statements in support of ecumenical efforts towards church unity: the Anglican "Appeal to All Christian People" and the Orthodox encyclical "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere" were widely acclaimed. During this period, the Life and Work movement under the leadership of the Archbishop of Uppsala, Nathan Söderblom, also began to take shape.

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4. There was contact and exchange of information between these two journals: see the letters between Adolf Küry and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, *BABe, AI 23* (file: "Versammlung 1920 Genf").

5. A translation of the visit of the deputation "to Europe and the East" into German by the Swiss Old Catholic Bishop Eduard Herzog was published in *IKZ 10 (1910), 1-35.* Robert H. Gardiner wrote to Adolf Küry ordering 500 off-prints of the article (at the end, Küry sent 700): Robert H. Gardiner to Adolf Küry, 26 December 1919, *BABe, AI 23* (file: "Versammlung 1920 Genf").

In 1919, the plans for a preliminary conference in Geneva became concrete. In a letter dated 26 December 1919, Robert Gardiner wrote to Adolf Küry in Basel that he had issued a call "for a preliminary meeting to be held at Geneva, August 12, 1920, to settle the details of further procedure and perhaps fix the date and place of the ultimate World Conference."[6]

The preliminary conference in Geneva in 1920

A total of 137 people attended the preparatory conference held from 12 to 20 August 1920, at the Palais de l'Athenée in Geneva, representing approximately eighty churches from forty countries.[7] Two-thirds of those present came from Protestant churches, twenty-three from Orthodox churches, twenty from Anglican churches, and four from Old Catholic churches. The Old Catholic Bishop Eduard Herzog from Bern, a doyen of ecumenism, was asked to open the conference with a prayer. Herzog, who was the last living participant of the Bonn Union Conferences in 1875,[8] welcomed the participants with the words "Blessed be they, who come in the name of the Lord"; then he read from the letter to the Ephesians 4: 1-6 followed by a prayer in German[9]; finally all those present prayed the "Our Father" together in their mother tongue.[10] Herzog proposed to elect Bishop Brent as chairman.[11] The conference proved to be a magnificent spiritual event. Participants were invited to participate in the liturgy in the Russian Church of Geneva. Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze reported the deep impression made by the "peculiarly mystical celebration" on many

6. Robert H. Gardiner to Adolf Küry, 26 December 1919, *BABe, AI 23* (file: "Versammlung 1920 Genf").

7. See World Conference on Faith and Order, *Report of the Preliminary Meeting at Geneva, Switzerland, August 12-20, 1920. A Pelgrimage Toward Unity,* (Faith and Order Paper 33 [First Series]; Geneva, 1920). The digitalized Faith and Order documents are available on: https://archive.org/search?vkey=1&query=church&sin=TXT&page=6&sort=-date&and%5B%5D=collection%3A%22faithandorderpapersdigitaledition%22 .

8. See "Zur Weltkonferenz über Glauben und Verfassung in Lausanne," *IKZ 17 (1927) 129-135*: 133.

9. Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze writes about this moment: "My English neighbor shakes my hand, delighted that we were first allowed to speak to God in German. The Lord's Prayer we recited together is a deeply solemn profession of faith in the one Lord of Christianity." Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, „Bericht über die Präliminarversammlung der Weltkonferenz über Glaube und Kirchenverfassung in Genf vom 12. bis 20. August 1920," *IKZ 11 (1921) 30-65: 32.* There are some difference with the minutes of the conference (see note 9). The editor of the Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift, Adolf Küry, explained the differences from the official protocol by saying that Siegmund-Schultze was keen to "give as accurate a report as possible." *IKZ 11* (1921), 66-7: 67.

10. See Angela Berlis, „Geschichte der Ökumene: Band des Friedens," *Christ in der Gegenwart* (2023) No. 4, 5. Bishop Herzog also issued a Pastoral Letter on the World Conference in Geneva, see *IKZ 10 (1920), 161-177*.

11. Siegmund-Schultze, "Bericht über die Präliminarversammlung," 33.

participants, and also about the "deep sympathy" felt for the "current difficult fate" of the Russian Church.[12] In his closing remarks, Bishop Brent said:

> The Spirit of God was the strength of the pilgrims. He made us one in our fellowship. The conference was a living body. Life touched life, nation touched nation, the spirit of the East held communion with the spirit of the West as perhaps never before.

The method adopted by the conference was "a comparison of opinions" from different denominational perspectives, mainly on the question of the meaning of the reunion of the churches.[13] Lucy Gardner, a Quaker and the only woman to participate, gave her maiden speech, emphasizing the importance for every human being of being led by the Holy Spirit.[14] The Anglican Charles Gore, bishop of the Church of England, requested that the conference commit to continuing its reflection on the terms and conditions for the necessary unity of the Church. The Continuation Committee, which was elected towards the end of the conference to take over the leadership of the Faith and Order movement, was tasked with addressing this question. It was also made responsible for preparing the First World Conference. Bishop Brent was elected chair, Robert H. Gardiner secretary, and George Zabriskie treasurer of the Continuation Committee. As Gardiner reported in a telegram on 20 August 1920, the fifty-one members of the committee included "Anglicans, Armenians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, Eastern Orthodox, German Evangelicals,[15] Lutherans, Methodists, Old Catholics, Presbyterians, Quakers, and Reformed." The fifteen-line message also commented on the approach adopted by the conference: "The meeting developed a new method of friendly conference replacing fruitless controversy on the differences between Christian churches."[16] However, the conference was also attentive to the political context, adopting a resolution: "The Conference earnestly desires that those nations not yet within the League of Nations will soon become or be admitted members of it."[17]

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12. Siegmund-Schultze, "Bericht über die Präliminarversammlung," 54-5.

13. Siegmund-Schultze, "Bericht über die Präliminarversammlung,"34.

14. Siegmund-Schultze, "Bericht über die Präliminarversammlung,"33-4.

15. Siegmund-Schultze makes a correction in his report: the term was not "Deutsch-Evangelische" but "Uniert-Evangelische." The intention of the conference was to include—alongside the Lutherans—also representatives of the German Protestant Church in the Continuation Committee, even if they had refused to participate in the conference. Brent's proposal on this matter and the decision reveal that the mind of the conference was to overcome alienation between churches. Siegmund-Schultze, "Bericht über die Präliminarversammlung," 62-3.

16. Robert H. Gardiner, secretary, World Conference on Faith and Order, Geneva, August 20, 1920, *BABe, AI 23* (file: "Versammlung 1920 Genf").

17. Gardiner, secretary, World Conference on Faith and Order.

The Continuation Committee began its work during the preliminary conference in Geneva and identified four topics to be addressed by the church commissions. These focused in particular on the question of "what degree of unity in faith" was necessary in a reunited church and whether a "statement of this one faith in the form of a creed" was necessary or desirable. The Continuation Committee met in Stockholm in 1925 and in Bern in 1926.[18]

Lausanne 1927: A conference in the "spirit of listening"[19]

From 3 to 21 August 1927, the First World Conference of Faith and Order was held at the University of Lausanne. Three hundred eighty-three men and nine women were present, most of them official delegates from their churches. In total, over 120 churches were represented. Africa, North America, and Europe were well represented, with two participants from Asia.[20] Bishop Brent again assumed the chair, but, for health reasons, he requested the election of a deputy chair (Alfred Ernest Garvie). Ralph W. Brown was elected as general secretary, and George Zabriskie was again appointed treasurer.

The Lausanne conference proceeded systematically. Each topic of discussion was first considered through several presentations in the plenary session, each speaker presenting from their denominational perspective.[21] The plenary was followed by a detailed discussion in sections. Everyone was free to decide which topic they wanted to discuss. The sections comprised up to one hundred members each and were divided into smaller subgroups to facilitate discussion. Each section drew up a report. Once this had been adopted unanimously or by a large majority, it was then submitted to the plenary session. Since the nature of the delegates' mandates varied greatly, the reports were not "adopted" but "received" in the plenary session. The procedural rules of the conference determined that no statement could be considered "adopted" by a section unless it had been accepted either unanimously or *nemine contradicente*

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18. In June 1924, Robert H. Gardiner died and his assistant, Ralph W. Brown, became secretary. An obituary, including the obituary by Charles Brent, was published in German in *IKZ 14 (1924), 129-133.*

19. Ernst Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz über Glauben und Verfassung. Lausanne, 3.–21. August 1927," *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift (IKZ) 17, no. 4 (1927): 227.*

20. See "Dokumente über die Weltkonferenz über Glauben und Verfassung, " *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 17:4 (1927), 193-216. This was followed by a report by Ernst Gaugler, who attended the conference: Gaugler, E. "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz über Glauben und Verfassung. Lausanne, 3. – 21. August 1927," *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift [= IKZ] 17:4* (1927) . For the official minutes see: H. N. Bate (ed.), *Faith and Order. Proceedings of the World Conference Lausanne, August 13-21, 1927* (New York: G.H. Doran Company, 1927).

21. The following summary is based on "Dokumente über die Weltkonferenz über Glauben und Verfassung," *IKZ 17:4 (1927), 193-216*, and on the report by the Old Catholic theologian Ernst Gaugler.

[without objection].[22] This approach shows the high value placed on dialogue. The aim was to find common ground; no one wanted to outvote others with a majority; rather, the goal was to say as much as possible together. The conference received six of the original seven reports: "The Call to Unity," "The Gospel," "The Nature of the Church," "The Common Confession of Faith of the Church," "The Ministry of the Church," and "The Sacraments." After a heated discussion, Report VII (The Unity of Christendom and the Position of Existing Churches on it) was received for transmission to the Continuation Committee for further work.[23] In addition to the reports, the conference documentation also contains statements from individual churches and groups intended to clarify specific topics from their point of view, for example, on the theological understanding of union (Archbishop Germanos for the Orthodox delegates), or the reaction from Prof. Eugène Choisy and André-Numa Bertrand, on behalf of the Reformed participants from different countries, to emphasize the historical meaning of the Lausanne Conference as a witness for spiritual unity in a world divided by hatred.

Additionally, a preamble, which was adopted, was included at the beginning of the documentation. In it, the principles of ecumenical dialogue were set out. The documents of the Lausanne World Conference were forwarded to the churches for further consideration.

Many reports on the Lausanne Conference appeared in the press. They show the novelty of this type of multilateral ecumenism as it took shape in the Faith and Order movement. A contemporary voice may convey something of the spirit of the World Conference to today's readers. Ernst Gaugler, a 36-year-old Old Catholic theologian who, after having served several years in parish ministry, had taken up a professorship for New Testament, Homiletics, and Catechetics at the then (Old Catholic) Catholic Theological Faculty in Bern in 1914, was present in Lausanne as a representative of the Christkatholische Kirche der Schweiz (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland). He gave a presentation in the section on the nature of the church.[24] He wrote a detailed sixty-three-page report of the whole conference for the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift,* which was published a few months after the Lausanne Conference. He deliberately "reported with restraint," as he writes at the end of his report. His intention, he said, was to give those who were not present "as objective a picture of the discussion as possible . . . from which they could form their own independent judgment." Gaugler focused primarily on the "discussion" ("Gespräch") because, in his opinion,

22. Cf. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 249.

23. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 279-80. With his mediation proposal, Bishop Brent, the president, prevented the rejection of the report. The report was originally presented by Nathan Söderblom, Archbishop of Uppsala, who then left and was therefore not present for the further discussion.

24. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 244.

"the seeds for further work must be sought in the discussion."[25] This "spirit of listening" characterized the entire conference, he found. Gaugler deliberately addressed those who had not attended, and possibly also "sceptics," to whom he wanted to convey the "vibrant background of the 'conversation' cultivated in Lausanne." For him, the deeper value of Lausanne was clear. As Bishop Brent had said, "No one can be the same as they were before."[26]

At the same time, Gaugler was also realistic about what had been achieved. It could not be expected, he pointed out, "that a few years of work, which had barely managed to penetrate the consciousness of the churches themselves, could eliminate what had arisen from heated struggles, grown over centuries, and become firmly established."[27] It was the way in which negotiations were conducted that was new. At the same time, contradictions and oppositions should not be glossed over. The "spirit of unity" found "vivid expression in the fraternal tone in which negotiations were conducted."[28] Charles Brent, the chairman of the conference, had been for Gaugler exemplary in his "lively selflessness"[29] and in his pursuit of unity. Gaugler gave a detailed summary of Brent's sermon on John 17:20-23 in the opening service, which took as its theme: "The call for unity is God's call to humanity."[30] For Gaugler, Brent's sermon had set out "the spiritual program of the entire undertaking." It had a profound effect on the entire conference: "Towards the end of the conference, *this unity, as the Son has with the Father, was emphasized more and more deeply.*"[31] Gaugler found the shared services and devotions of central importance: "Without them, all the other work would be up in the air and completely incomprehensible."[32] He noted that the sessions did not begin after *a prayer, but with prayer.*[33] Gaugler's careful summaries of the lectures cannot be discussed in more detail here. However, as an exegete, he was particularly impressed by the lectures given by New Testament scholar Adolf Deissmann (Berlin) on the Gospel as the Church's message to the world and by Russian scholar Nicholas von Arseniew on the message of resurrection as the centre of the Gospel.[34] For many Protestant

25. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 280.

26. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 280.

27. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 220.

28. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 221.

29. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 227. For Gaugler, this lively selflessness is reflected in the way Charles Brent accepted his election as president. „He wants only one thing for this conference: that we come closer to God, unashamed, even if we have to sacrifice our previous convictions."

30. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 221.

31. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 223.

32. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 224.

33. Cf. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 227.

34. Cf. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 228-230 (Deissmann) and 235 (Arseniew).

delegates, it was of fundamental importance that the conference began with the Bible. As an Old Catholic, however, Gaugler also sympathized with speakers who pointed to continuity with the early Church (for example, the significance of the ecumenical councils[35] or the tradition of the early, undivided Church[36]). He was particularly impressed by Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze's lecture: "Here, a Protestant voice expressed an understanding of the ideas of the early church that I consider promising, because it does not merely present them in a didactic way, but, what is so immensely important, brings them to life."[37] The discussion on the "common creed of the Church" revealed the range of meanings attributed to the creeds of the early Church within different churches, but the conference agreed that the testimony of these creeds "is our common heritage from the early Church."[38] An addendum to the documentation addressed the question of the Filioque. It acknowledged that the relationship between Scripture and tradition varies from church to church, with some churches making no use of creeds and others having additional creeds specific to their own traditions.[39] Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, "the well-known leader of the Stockholm Unity Movement," addressed in his lecture "The Unity of Christianity and the Position of the Existing Churches on It," among other things, the great "blessing of church unity," which, however, could only be achieved "at the price of joint, patient, and prayerful reflection ["Denkarbeit" in German], through which we are enabled to distinguish what is necessary and what, depending on the situation, is appropriate and important in confession and church constitution."[40] For Gaugler, it was important that "all types" of churches had a say in the topics discussed at the world conference. As can be seen from his account, Gaugler expected further deepening of discussions about the conference themes in the future.

The conference saw itself as a praying community: one that had "come together in common prayer with deep gratitude to God."[41] While acknowledging existing doctrinal differences, the conference testified to the unity it had found in the common Christian faith as proclaimed in the Holy Scriptures and attested to and preserved in the ecumenical creed "which bears the name of Nicaea" and in the Apostles' Creed.[42]

35. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 225-26. (Prof. Werner Elert from Erlangen and Archbishop Germanos of Thyateira).

36. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 236. According to Prof. H. S. Alivisatos from Athens.

37. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 242.

38. "Dokumente über die Weltkonferenz," 200.

39. See "Dokumente über die Weltkonferenz," 200-01.

40. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 268.

41. "Dokumente über die Weltkonferenz," 200.

42. Dokumente über die Weltkonferenz," 200.

Conclusion

With the advent of the modern ecumenical movement, churches shaped and developed sustainable paths of theological debate and practical cooperation, which became formative and supportive. PECUSA's initiative to make "faith" and "order" the basis for addressing church divisions fell on fertile ground in many Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant church families. The USA, at that time already a plural religious landscape, proved to be a good starting point for establishing contact with the churches in the Old World, many of whose members had migrated to the USA, taking their denominations with them.

Laypeople and church leaders alike were able to set out together on a path that—despite (or perhaps in response to) the trials and tribulations of an era in upheaval—was inspired by a longing for unity. The individual initiatives that arose from this longing for unity and reconciliation started at different points and with different emphases. Some were more concerned with unity through theology, while others were more focused on unity in practice. In the decades after 1910, it became clear that it was good to join forces and that, in certain areas and through specific individuals, there was already some overlap and collaboration.[43] Initiatives towards closer ties between Faith and Order and Life and Work arose in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1937, the second World Conference of Life and Work took place in Oxford, and shortly after, the Second World Conference on Faith and Order was held in Edinburgh. Both these conferences agreed to appoint a commission to work towards the formation of a World Council of Churches. This finally came to fruition in 1948, creating an organization that brought both movements together.

The early Faith and Order movement established the course for methods of discussion in multilateral ecumenical dialogue. At the same time, the first steps were also taken towards expanding the number of people involved in the dialogue. The few women present in Lausanne submitted a statement that women should be more involved in ecumenical work.[44] This demand was reflected in the preamble of the Lausanne conference in the recognition that "we men" had "carried the torch of unity alone for too many years,"[45] and the call for women to be "given their share of responsibility" so that the whole Church could work for unity.

The conferences in Geneva (1920) and Lausanne (1927) set the standards for the work of Faith and Order. Perhaps most importantly, they formed the

43. Prominent figures in both movements included Nathan Söderblom and Alfred E. Garvie, but also Lucy Gardner. For these processes in Life and Work, see Charlotte Methuen, "The Anglo-German Theological Conferences 1927-1931: Some Preliminary Findings," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte / Contemporary Church History 20 (2007), 418-449.*

44. Gaugler, "Bericht über die Weltkonferenz," 276.

45. "Dokumente über die Weltkonferenz," 195.

spirit in which meetings have been held ever since: agreement is sought, while disagreement is acknowledged. As Robert H. Gardiner wrote to Adolf Küry a few weeks after the preliminary conference in Geneva, "we all felt that the Conference marked a great step forward. There are many difficulties still to be overcome, but I think we were convinced that with patience and submission to God's will, they may be overcome."[46]

46. Robert H. Gardiner to Adolf Küry, 7 September 1920, *BABe, AI 23* (file: "Versammlung 1920 Genf").

DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF FAITH AND ORDER FROM SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA TO WADI EL NATRUN

Stephen G. Brown[*]

In 1963, in advance of the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal, Canada, and in 1993, before the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, the World Council of Churches (WCC) published two documentary histories of the Commission on Faith and Order. The first covered the period 1927–63 and the second 1963–93. These were substantial publications intended to help participants become acquainted with the work of Faith and Order over the preceding decades, while also providing a written record of the work accomplished.

In neither case did technology make it possible to refer readers to online versions of the documents cited, so these volumes also included the full texts of many of the Faith and Order studies undertaken in the relevant periods. In the meantime, not least thanks to the vision and work of the former director of Faith and Order, Rev. Dr Odair Pedroso Mateus, the Faith and Order Papers Online Edition has been created. It offers online access and full-text search capabilities to all Faith and Order Papers published since the very beginnings of the movement in 1910.[47] Accordingly, what follows in a narrative of the main work of Faith and Order since the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993, including links to the documents referenced. To aid access to these documents, these links are found in the body of the text rather than in the footnote section.

This text is organized in four sections.[48] The first offers background on the Fifth World Conference itself, with links to the main studies that preceded the conference and influenced its work. The second section covers the period from Santiago de Compostela in 1993 to the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013. It sets out how the studies begun after 1993 culminated before the

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47. See Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition, WCC website, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/faith-and-order-papers-digital-edition.

48. This survey has been produced on the basis of the reports from the central committee of the World Council of Churches to the WCC assemblies in Harare (1998), Porto Alegre (2006), Busan (2013), and Karlsruhe (2022), as well as other Faith and Order material, including the texts presented in this survey. Thanks are due in particular to Rev. Dr Dagmar Heller, a Faith and Order staff member from 1993 to 2000 and from 2007 to 2018, who read the text and offered helpful suggestions.

Busan assembly in three major documents: the study text *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, the convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV), and the study document *Moral Discernment in the Churches* (MDC).[1] The third section runs from the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan to its 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022, when the commission was engaged in detailed work following up on TCTCV and MDC and reflecting on the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The fourth and final section sets out the other areas of work beyond the study projects of the Commission on Faith and Order.

From 1993 to 2013, the Plenary Commission of Faith and Order met three times: in Moshi in 1996, in Kuala Lumpur in 2004, and in Crete in 2010. The reports of the meetings can be found below:

- *Called to Be the One Church: Faith and Order at Crete*, Faith and Order Paper No. 212 (WCC Publications, 2012), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.219.
- *Faith and Order at the Crossroads: Kuala Lumpur 2004,* Faith and Order Paper No. 196 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.203.
- *Faith and Order in Moshi: The 1996 Commission Meeting,* Faith and Order Paper No. 177 (WCC Publications, 1998), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.184.
- Minutes of the meetings of the Standing Commission of Faith and Order, 1995–2014. See Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition, https://faithandorder.short.gy/ubXSYo.

In 2014, the size of the Commission on Faith and Order was reduced significantly and there was no longer a distinction between the Standing Commission and the Plenary Commission.

1. The Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, 1993

The Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order took place in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, from 3–14 August 1993, three decades after the Fourth World Conference in Montreal, Canada, in 1963. The theme of the conference was "Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness." In advance of the conference, the Commission on Faith and Order published a discussion paper with the title *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness*, summarizing the fruits of past

1. *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, Faith and Order Paper No. 210 (WCC Publications, 2011), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.217; *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.221; *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, Faith and Order Paper No. 215 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.222.

Faith and Order work, insights from bilateral dialogues, and results from other areas of work in the WCC, as well as the commission's experience of a growing life together.

- *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness: A Discussion Paper, Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993,* Faith and Order Paper No. 161 (WCC Publications, 1993), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.168.

Several factors shaped the context in which the Fifth World Conference took place. The first factor was the analysis of the churches' responses to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, comprising six published volumes. It concluded with a list of ecclesiological themes for further study: the role of the Church in God's saving purpose; the idea of *koinonia*; the Church as a gift of the word of God (*creatura verbi*); the Church as mystery or sacrament of God's love for the world; the Church as the pilgrim people of God; and the Church as prophetic sign and servant of God's coming kingdom.

- *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Text, 6 vols.* (WCC Publications, 1986–88); *see* Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition: https://faithandorder.short.gy/hpQkGJ.
- *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982–1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper 149 (WCC Publications, 1990), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.156.

To mark the 25th anniversary of BEM, a special volume of reflections in the convergence text was later published in 2007.

- *BEM at 25: Critical Insights into a Continuing Legacy,* Faith and Order Paper No. 205 (WCC Publications, 2007), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.212.

A second factor was the results of the Faith and Order study process "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today." This demonstrated a convergence on the doctrinal content of the Creed, including what it professes concerning the Church.

- *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381), new revised version,* Faith and Order Paper No.163 (WCC Publications, 1999), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.160.

A third factor was the study process on "The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community," which underlined the nature of the Church as sign and instrument of God's saving design for the world.

- *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community,* Faith and Order Paper No. 151 (WCC Publications, 1990), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.158.

A fourth factor was linked to the ecclesiological challenges raised by the conciliar process on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), initiated by the WCC's 5th Assembly in Vancouver in 1983 and culminating in the World Convocation on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul in 1990.

- "Final Document: Entering into Covenant Solidarity for Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation," in *Between the Flood and the Rainbow: Interpreting the Conciliar Process of Mutual Commitment (Covenant) to Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation* (WCC Publications, 1992), 164–90; https://archive.org/details/wcclifework120/page/164.

Many claimed that JPIC had undeniable ecclesial dimensions and that this conciliar process has been among their most profound experiences of "church," but the history of the 20th- century ecumenical movement was marked by deep debate between those committed to visible church unity and those focused on witness, service, and moral struggle. A consultation on "Costly Unity" held in Rønde, Denmark, in February 1993, explored the relationship between *koinonia*, ecclesiology, and ethics in advance of the world conference.[2]

And a fifth factor was the statement on "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling," adopted by the WCC's 7th Assembly in Canberra in 1991.

- "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling," in *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (WCC Publications, 1992), 172–74, https://archive.org/details/wcca23/page/172.

All these processes came together in the theme chosen for the Fifth World Conference. *Koinonia* was described as "a gracious fellowship in Christ expressing the richness of the gift received by creation and humankind from God."[3] This shared life of Christians is rooted in the triune God, "the perfect expression of unity and diversity and the ultimate reality of relational life."[4] Both unity and diversity needed to be safeguarded within the Church: "difference is

2. Presentations and reports from the consultation can be found in the volume *Costly Unity: Koinonia and Justice, Peace, and Creation*, ed. Thomas F. Best and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (World Council of Churches Unit II, 1993). The report from this consultation is included in the text *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, referenced later in this survey.

3. *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia,* "Report of Section 1: The Understanding of Koinonia and its Implications," para. 4.

4. "The Understanding of Koinonia," para. 10.

not a factor to exclude anyone from the koinonia of the Church, especially when such differences are expressive of weakness or vulnerability."[5] The report of the conference contained the keynote addresses, reports of the plenary discussions and sections, and an interpretive introduction by Thomas F. Best.

- *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, August 1993,* Faith and Order Paper No. 166 (WCC Publications, 1994), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.173/mode/2up.

2. From Santiago de Compostela (1993) to Busan (2013)

Following the Fifth World Conference in 1993, the work of Faith and Order was organized around four major study emphases, initially described as **ecclesiology**, **ecumenical hermeneutics**, **worship**, and **ecclesiology and ethics**. Each was a study in its own right—with its own processes of consultation, reporting, and drafting, drawing on theologians and members of the Commission on Faith and Order—but they were understood to be interlinked.

Each of these study emphases led to the development of further issues and themes significant to the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013. The study on **ecclesiology** led to the publication of the convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. The work on **ecumenical hermeneutics** led to substantial reflections on common understandings of the one Tradition and developed the idea of the Church as a hermeneutical community. It led, furthermore, to studies on the sources of authority in the Church.

The studies on **worship** were accompanied by reflections on baptism, leading to the publication of the study text *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*.[6] The studies on **ecclesiology and ethics** initially conducted with the WCC unit on Justice, Peace, and Creation led to reflections on the Church as a moral community. They were followed by theological reflections on peace and on power in conjunction with the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence 2001–2010. The work on ecclesiology and ethics was also the basis for further studies of the Commission on Faith and Order in the field of theological anthropology, which was followed in turn by the study on *Moral Discernment in the Churches*.

2.1 Ecclesiology: The Church as Koinonia

The aim of this study was a convergence statement on the nature and purpose of the Church, emphasizing the interrelatedness of faith, worship, and witness.

5. "The Understanding of Koinonia," para. 16.

6. *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, Faith and Order Paper No. 210 (WCC Publications, 2011).

This led to several years of dialogue, including two consultations on the understanding and practice of *episkopé*—the ministry of oversight as it has been understood within different Christian traditions.

- *Episkopé and Episcopacy and the Quest for Visible Unity: Two Consultations,* Faith and Order Paper No. 183 (WCC Publications, 1999), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.190.

After several years of study and dialogue, an initial text was published in 1998 under the title *The Nature and Purpose of the Church.*

- *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 181 (WCC Publications, 1988), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.188.

The status of *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* as a provisional text was expressed in the subtitle*: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement.* It contained six chapters: "The Church of the Triune God"; "The Church in History"; "The Church as *Koinonia* (Communion)"; "Life in Communion"; "Service in and for the World"; and "Following Our Calling: From Converging Understandings to Mutual Recognition."

Responses to this text were received from churches, ecumenical organizations, regional councils of churches, academic institutions, and individuals.

Some issues were not included: for instance, there was no section on teaching authority and the topic of mission received little attention. The Fifth World Conference had called for a study on "the question of a universal ministry of Christian unity," which was not reflected in the text. Significantly, in his 1995 encyclical letter on commitment to ecumenism, *Ut unum sint,* inviting dialogue about the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul II cited the Faith and Order recommendation from Santiago.

Following the responses received to the text, a new draft entitled *The Nature and Mission of the Church* was presented to the WCC's 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Seeking to incorporate the suggestions from the various responses, it consisted of four chapters: "The Church of the Triune God"; "The Church in History"; "The Life of Communion in and for the World"; and "In and For the World."

- *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.205.

Alongside the text of the new draft, a volume was published of theological contributions to the drafting process from 2001–2004. This was intended

to assist in revisions to the draft but also to raise important ecclesiological issues within the churches and beyond, such as "Authority and Authoritative Teaching" and "Ministry and Ordination in the Community of Women and Men in the Church," together with the report of a consultation on "Does the Church Have a Sacramental Nature?"

- *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church*, Faith and Order Paper No. 197 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.204.

The WCC central committee had also requested Faith and Order to prepare a concise statement on ecclesiology for discussion at the WCC's 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre that would take into account the relation between the Church as local community and universal reality, and the fact that the Church is both diverse and one. The statement was developed through a broadly consultative process within the WCC.

- "Called to be the One Church: An Invitation to the Churches to Renew their Commitment to the Search for Unity and to Deepen their Dialogue," in *God, in Your Grace...: Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (WCC Publications, 2007), 255–60, https://archive.org/details/godinyourgraceof00unse/page/n263.

The Nature and Mission of the Church, subtitled *"A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement,"* was also sent to the churches for response. More than 80 responses were received, although only around 30 were specifically from the churches.

Following the receipt of the responses, at the Plenary Commission meeting of Faith and Order in Crete in October 2009, it was agreed to shorten the text and to make it more contextual, more reflective of the lives of the churches throughout the world, and more accessible to a wider readership.

In June 2010 at Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia, the Faith and Order Standing Commission decided that, after a careful examination of the responses to *The Nature and Mission of the Church* and the evaluations of the text from the meeting of the Plenary Commission in Crete, the time was right to begin a final revision.

At that time there was, however, no substantial response from Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. Accordingly, a major inter-Orthodox consultation was held at Agia Napa, Cyprus, in March 2011, which produced an extensive evaluation of *The Nature and Mission of the Church*. In particular, it was proposed to integrate more clearly the material on baptism, eucharist, and ministry into the presentation of what is essential to the life of the Church.

- "Inter-Orthodox Consultation for a Response to the Faith and Order Study 'The Nature and Mission of the Church,' WCC website (2011), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/NapaCommunique.pdf.

The consultation and its report became a significant component of the next meeting of the Ecclesiology Working Group and hence played a unique role in the process that led to the new text.

The final revised text was presented to the Standing Commission in Penang, Malaysia, in 2012, which unanimously approved it as a convergence statement with the title *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. The text was received by the WCC Central Committee in 2012, which commended it to member churches for study and formal response.

- *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.221.

The text was thus not a stage on the way to a further statement; rather, it held the same status and character as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. It brought to completion a particular stage of reflection on the Church. It was sent to the churches as a common point of reference to test or discern their own ecclesiological convergences with one another, and so to serve their further pilgrimage toward the manifestation of that unity for which Christ prayed.

2.2 Ecumenical Hermeneutics

Behind the Faith and Order study on ecumenical hermeneutics, begun in 1994, lay the recognition that dialogues between churches are often complicated or even blocked by different ways of understanding and doing theology, which are deeply rooted in different cultural and confessional heritages. The text *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics* was published following three study consultations (Dublin, 1994; Lyon, 1996; and Bossey, 1997), a discussion at the Plenary Commission meeting in Moshi in 1996, and two drafting meetings (Boston, 1994, and Faverges, 1998). It was aimed at groups and committees preparing and responding to ecumenical documents; councils of churches creating study programmes; ecumenical officers and ecumenical committees of churches; persons who exercised a ministry of oversight; local churches and their ministers; and teacher of ecumenism. The goal was to better understand the processes going on in ecumenical dialogues.

- *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper No. 182 (WCC Publications, 1998), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.189.

This was complemented by the publication of *Interpreting Together*, a book of the essays and studies from the consultations that contributed to the text on hermeneutics.

- *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper No. 189 (WCC Publications, 2001), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.196.

At the beginning of the new millennium, it was decided to go beyond "classical" hermeneutics and tackle the area that defines different readings (and interpretations) of biblical texts. At the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2004 it was proposed to study various sources believed to be authoritative in churches and therefore foundational for the distinctive interpretations. This process started with a consultation on the authority of the early church teachers and witnesses. It was held in 2008 at Westminster College, Cambridge, a home of Reformed theology in Britain founded by two distinguished self-taught women scholars. This was followed by a consultation in Moscow in 2011 on sources of authority in contemporary churches: How do the churches reflect on authority today? Is there a common pattern of thought and behaviour with regard to authority? The results and papers from these two consultations were published in 2014.

- *The Early Church, vol. 1, Sources of Authority*, Faith and Order Paper No. 217 (WCC Publications, 2014), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.224.
- *Contemporary Churches, vol. 2, Sources of Authority*, Faith and Order Paper No. 218 (WCC Publications, 2014), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.225.

2.3 Worship

Faith and Order's historic concern with the relationship of worship to the unity of the Church was the subject of a consultation in Ditchingham, England, in 1994. There, theologians and liturgical scholars investigated the variety that can flourish within a common pattern of worship. The title of the published report of this consultation, *So We Believe, So We Pray*, underscored the link between worship and church unity.

- *So We Believe, So We Pray: Towards Koinonia in Worship*, Faith and Order Paper No. 171 (WCC Publications, 1995), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.178.

With the report came the recommendation for further work on specific ecclesiological questions. This led to the publication of a survey of the

understanding and practice of worship in a wide variety of Christian churches, communities, and contexts.

- *Worship Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, Faith and Order Paper No. 194 (WCC Publications, 2004), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.201.

2.4 Ecumenical Implications of Baptism

Discussion of future work on worship in relation to unity took place at the Faith and Order Board meeting in Bangkok, January 1996. This suggested that the topic of baptism would be fruitful for the next stage of the work. Through the liturgical renewal movement which had developed since the 1950s, many churches had discovered a surprising degree of common ground in their understanding and practice of worship. Yet worship is also the place where the divisions among the churches become immediately and painfully evident, particularly in relation to special liturgical moments such as baptism and the eucharist. At a consultation in Faverges, France, in 1997, some 20 liturgists, theologians, church musicians, and pastors discussed the implications of the common baptism for personal identity as Christians, for the churches, and for the ecumenical movement.

- *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, Faith and Order Paper No. 184 (WCC Publications, 1999), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.191.

A further text was published following the WCC's 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006. This examined the meaning and implications of the mutual recognition of baptism and explored issues preventing mutual recognition. It examined biblical texts, sacraments, baptismal practice, the church and church membership, and suggested ways of moving forward including practical ways of expressing recognition.

- *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, Faith and Order Paper No. 207 (WCC Publications, 2008), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.214.

This led to the publication in 2011 of *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*—a study document rather than a common statement of the Commission on Faith and Order. It explored the close relation between baptism and the believer's lifelong growth into Christ as a basis for greater mutual recognition of baptism. It also addressed issues in baptismal understanding and liturgical practice that cause difficulty within churches, and hinder the mutual recognition of baptism between them today

- *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition,* Faith and Order Paper No. 210 (WCC Publications, 2011), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.217.

2.5 Ecclesiology and Ethics

The Fifth World Conference requested a study on ethics and ecclesiology to be "directly linked to local experiences of the interconnectedness of faith and action and move between an investigation of the moral substance of traditions and the moral experience of the people of God today."[7] It further recommended work on anthropology and the theology of creation, adding that "it is essential for the churches to recognize that the threats to human survival on this planet are real and that the tasks before us, in response to God's sustaining and redeeming work, are urgent."[8]

The work on ecclesiology and ethics was undertaken jointly between Faith and Order and the WCC's Unit III on Justice, Peace, and Creation. It had begun already before the Fifth World Conference with the consultation on "Costly Unity" in January 1993 in Rønde, Denmark. This was followed by two further consultations on "Costly Commitment" (at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute) and "Costly Obedience" (in Johannesburg) pointing to the close link between ethics and ecclesiological reflection and describing "the ethical dimension as a datum of ecclesiology." The texts of the three study documents from these consultations were published together:

- *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church,* ed. Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra (WCC Publications, 1997), https://archive.org/details/wcclifework304.

Here, the Church was characterized as "moral community," a notion that was further developed as being expressed "in the practice of 'moral formation.'" This led finally to understanding "the ecumenical movement itself as a 'moral community.'"[9]

As a follow up, the WCC central committee requested further collaboration between Faith and Order and Unit III in two other projects: a new Faith and Order study on "Ethnic Identity, National Identity and the Unity of the Church" and on theological reflections on peace in cooperation with the WCC's Programme to Overcome Violence.

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7. *On the Way to Koinonia*, "Report of Section IV: Called to Common Witness for a Renewed World," §34.

8. "Called to Common Witness for a Renewed World," §31.

9. *Ecclesiology and Ethics, xi.*

2.5.1 Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and the Search for Unity

The study on *Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and the Search for Unity* recognized that the life and witness of the churches are impaired by their divisions, tragically and often most intractably when these follow lines of ethnic or national identities in conflict. Consultations of biblical scholars, theologians, and social scientists were held in 2003 and 2004, together with self-studies from Sudan and Fiji. This was intended to help churches in situations of conflict reflect on their role in maintaining or legitimizing divisions in both church and society, and on their calling to witness together to reconciliation and justice. This led to the publication of *Participating in Gods Mission of Reconciliation*, which included the report of the study on ethnic and national identity.

- *Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation: An Invitation to the Churches*, Faith and Order Paper No. 201 (WCC Publications, 2006), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.208.

2.5.2 Theological Reflection on Peace

Out of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence 2001–2011, a study process was begun on "Nurturing Peace, Overcoming Violence: In the Way of Christ for the Sake of the World." Churches, seminaries, and ecumenical partners were invited to reflect on major themes of justice, peace, and reconciliation. This led to the publication in 2001 of the text *Nurturing Peace*.

- "Nurturing Peace, Overcoming Violence: In the Way of Christ for the Sake of the World," WCC website (2001), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/NurturingPeace.pdf.

In addition to inviting reflection and input on study documents from individual churches and institutions, consultations were held in Rwanda in December 2004 on "Affirming Human Dignity, Rights of the Peoples, and the Integrity of Creation" and in Norway in 2005 on "Realizing Mutuality and Interdependence in a World of Diverse Identities."

- "Theological Consultation on Affirming Human Dignity, Rights of Peoples and the Integrity of Creation, Kigali, Rwanda, 4–9 December 2004," in *Minutes of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order*, Faith and Order Paper No. 200 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.207/page/34/mode/2up.
- "Realizing Mutuality and Interdependence in a World of Diverse Identities," Oslo, Norway, April 2005 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/realizing-mutuality-and-interdependence-in-a-world-of-diverse-identities.

One of the themes of the study process, "Interrogating and Redefining Power," was the focus of two consultations. The first, in December 2003, was organized cooperatively by Faith and Order, International Affairs, and Justice, Peace, and Creation. It integrated theological questions of peace and justice with questions and challenges such as impunity and reconciliation, economic globalization, climate change, and violence against women. Younger theologians from the South then met in Chiang Mai in February 2004 for spirited discussions exploring their distinct perspectives on power as persons whose theology is shaped in contexts of intense struggles for life, justice, and liberation.

- "Interrogating and Redefining Power: A Theological Consultation," Crêt Bérard, Switzerland, December 2003, WCC website, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/interrogating-and-redefining-power-a-theological-consultation.
- "Interrogating and Redefining Power: Consultation of Younger Theologians from the South," Chang Mai, February 2004, WCC website, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/interrogating-and-redefining-power-a-theological-consultation.

2.5.3 Theological Anthropology

The work on ecclesiology and ethics was also the basis for further studies of the Commission on Faith and Order in the field of anthropology. While the issue had been mentioned at the Fifth World Conference in Santiago de Compostela from the perspective of the integrity of creation, it also surfaced at the WCC's 8th Assembly in Harare in 1998 around questions of human sexuality. The assembly requested a study on theological anthropology: the understanding of the nature of the human person from a Christian point of view, and its implications for issues such as community identity, human sexuality, disabilities, and bioethics. A series of consultations focused on the nature of the human person made in the image of God, especially in light of the challenges to the understanding of human identity coming from current social and scientific developments. The result was the 2005 study document *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*.

- *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, Faith and Order Paper No. 199 (WCC Publications, 2005), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.206.

2.5.4 From Theological Anthropology to Moral Discernment

As a follow-up to the study on theological anthropology, the Standing Commission on Faith and Order decided in 2006 to "conduct a study of the ways in which the churches formulate and offer teaching and guidance with

respect to moral and ethical issues especially those that are or may become church-dividing, e.g. human sexuality."[10] This was started the following year under the working title "Moral Discernment in the Churches" to explore the "various ways churches make decisions about moral issues"[11] and to try and "identify principles and practices of moral discernment we hold in common as churches and to discover where we diverge." It was also decided to employ a case study approach as the foundational method for the study.

A consultation in New York in 2008 of the working group for the Moral Discernment Study reflected on work that had already been done on the issue in bilateral and multilateral documents within the academic world and within the WCC. It went on to set out a process to develop criteria for cases to help understand differences and commonalities in moral discourse and to develop an awareness and sensitivity for how conflict emerges. The purpose was not to solve or resolve the respective issues, but to facilitate the analysis of the different factors involved in various potentially church-dividing moral issues. Case studies highlighted different forms of ecclesial division, intrachurch division, interchurch division, division between churches in the global North and the global South, and divisions between different cultures. A study document, *Moral Discernment in the Churches* (MDC), was published in 2013, following a joint meeting at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey of members of the study group and the Orthodox participants of the Faith and Order standing commission. Orthodox members of the Commission on Faith and Order wished to add an addendum that stated that the document "could be used in Orthodox theological schools and academic circles" but expressed some "concerns regarding the whole study process. The Orthodox read the text in ways that do not reflect their tradition."[12] The addendum mentioned, in particular, the methodology used and the way the sources are presented in relation to each other. The addendum explicitly recommended that MDC be presented to the 2013 WCC assembly as a preliminary work in a more extensive study and that moral discernment be placed on the agenda of Faith and Order in the future. The Roman Catholic Church added a footnote to this addendum expressing that Catholics shared similar concerns, but would endorse the presentation of MDC to the WCC 2013 as a preliminary stage of a study that Faith and Order might continue in the future.

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10. *Minutes of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order, Faverges, Haute-Savoie, France 2006,* Faith and Order Paper No. 202 (WCC Publications, 2006), 107. https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.209.

11. *Faith and Order Standing Commission Minutes, Crans-Montana*, *12-19 June 2007*, Faith and Order Paper No. 206 (WCC Publications, 2007), 43, https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.213.

12. "Orthodox Addendum," in *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, Faith and Order Paper No. 215 (WCC Publications, 2013), 3-4. https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.222.

- *Moral Discernment in the Churches*, Faith and Order Paper No. 215 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.222.

3. From Busan (2013) to Karlsruhe (2022)

Work in Faith and Order between the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013 and its 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022 came from the three study groups of the Commission on Faith and Order. This work included the call to the churches to be together in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace; the common understanding of the Church; and disagreements concerning the teaching of the churches on moral issues.

3.1 Witnessing Together on Justice and Peace

In 2013 the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan issued a call to engage in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. This was accompanied in Faith and Order by a study group that drew on the wealth of Christian traditions in order to help the churches witness together on justice and peace in today's world. It led to the publication of three texts. *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* was approved by the Faith and Order commission in 2017. It invites the churches to explore the ways that *pilgrimage* can help them deepen and express the commitment to oneness in their work. Pilgrimages are transformative journeys that are ultimately directed toward the reign of God. As they move together and face the challenges of the journey, pilgrims may be opened unexpectedly to new experiences of the holy. At its best, the way of pilgrimage also opens new ways of understanding and living toward unity, justice, and peace among churches and, indeed, among all humanity. A theology of pilgrimage challenges the churches to reflect on these questions and to consider how the churches can continue to travel from broken communion to full visible unity.

- *Come and See: A Theological Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, Faith and Order Paper No. 224 (WCC Publications, 2019), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.233.

Cultivate and Care (2020) picks up the affirmation in Come and See that addressing human behaviour that is responsible for climate devastation constitutes not *"merely one justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns,"* but is one *"of foundational importance for all existence and identity."*[13] It notes that *Come and See* affirms the importance of a theology of justice within and for creation in the journey toward the visible unity of the Church. The paper points to some of the urgent environmental situations that cry out for

13. *Cultivate and Care, 5,* quoting from *Come and See*, §24.

Christian reflection and action. It roots such a response in the WCC's increasing ecumenical consideration of creation and in various theological, ecclesiological, and ecumenical convictions shared by the churches, which call them to join together in engagement to protect the environment. Finally, it proposes ways in which such an engagement can take form.

- *Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation*, Faith and Order Paper No. 226 (WCC Publications, 2020), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.235.

Love and Witness (2020) seeks to develop more fully the insights of *Come and See* concerning peace and religious plurality. It engages with the insights of the WCC and others to ask what our many traditions can say together about the encounter with other religions on the journey toward visible unity—engagement that is a necessary part of the Church's pilgrim way. How does the pilgrim Church journey in the midst of religious plurality in ways that bring joy, peace, and reconciliation to the world? What are the implications of these reflections for the search for Christian unity?

- *Love and Witness: Proclaiming the Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural World*, Faith and Order Paper No. 230 (WCC Publications, 2020), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.239.

3.2 The Common Understanding of the Church

The common understanding of the Church was the topic addressed by the second study group. The group analyzed the 78 responses to the 2013 document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV) between 2013 and 2020. Most of the responses were submitted by churches, national or local councils of churches, and ecumenical organizations. TCTCV asked five questions designed to help discern the extent to which TCTCV expresses a convergence, and to chart further work needed to move toward the full visible unity of the churches. The responses were published in 2021 in two volumes as *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. The process of reception chosen deliberately continued the pattern set out in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM). Along the way, the need to expand the dialogue to include more voices from the churches of the global South, and from emergent ecclesial movements and churches, became apparent. The analysis of the responses to TCTCV reconfirmed the real urgency of this need: geographically speaking, 97 percent of the responses came from the global North.

- *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, vol. 1, Faith and Order Paper No. 231, (WCC Publications, 2021), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.242.

- *Churches Respond to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, vol. 2, Faith and Order Paper No. 232 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.243.

These two volumes documenting the responses were followed by a third summarizing the responses and identifying key issues.

- *What Are the Churches Saying About the Church? Key Findings and Proposals from the Responses to The Church: Towards a Common Vision,* Faith and Order Paper No. 236 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.247.

Between 2015 and 2020, a group of Faith and Order commissioners met often to read, analyze, and reflect together on the more than 78 responses received to TCTCV. They also reflected on what to say to the churches and how to challenge the churches about their fellowship as a result of this work. They identified 16 key themes or issues often raised by the responses and they produced papers on each of these. The papers were then discussed by the group and revised in light of the discussions. The issues that were identified were:

- Visible Unity and Mutual Recognition;
- Communion and *Koinonia*; Apostolic Faith;
- The Role and Authority of the Laity;
- The Threefold Ministry;
- The Relationship between the Local and Universal Church;
- Ecumenical Councils;
- Experience in the Life of the Church;
- Ecumenical Reception;
- The Church and Mission;
- The Church in and for the World;
- Sacraments and Sacramentality of the Church;
- Legitimate Diversity;
- Authority;
- The Role of Women in the Church;
- The Theme of Sin in Relation to the Church as Such.

These reflections have been published in the volume *Common Threads*.

- *Common Threads: Key Themes from Responses to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 233 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.250.

With 97 percent of the responses to TCTCV coming from the global North, and 92 percent from bodies traditionally part of the ecumenical movement, the fastest growing part of global Christianity had not responded or engaged with TCTCV. Therefore, in addition to the engagement with the responses received, the commission organized three consultations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America at which TCTCV functioned as the starting point of the conversation. The Faith and Order commissioners presented the main points of the convergence text, and the regional theologians responded with how the churches that they represented viewed these issues. The first consultation in 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania, focused on African perspectives on ecclesiology and included leaders from African Independent churches and Pentecostal churches. The second consultation, in 2019, in Vitória, Brazil, was on "Towards a Global Vision of the Church: Dialogue with Latin American Pentecostalism." The third, on Asian perspectives on ecclesiology, took place in 2021, and was held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of the denominational broadening of perspectives, Faith and Order commissioners analyzed bilateral dialogues in which Pentecostals and Evangelicals were involved. A 2018 consultation at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, met under the title "Towards a Global Vision of the Church," and included theologians who presented papers on Evangelical, Pentecostal, and independent perspectives on ecclesiology. The results of these initiatives on broadening the regional and denominational perspectives were published in two volumes in 2022.

- *Towards a Global Vision of the Church: Explorations on Global Christianity and Ecclesiology, vol. 1,* Faith and Order Paper No. 234 (WCC Publications, 2022), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.251.
- *Towards a Global Vision of the Church: Explorations on Global Christianity and Ecclesiology, vol. 2*, Faith and Order Paper No. 239 (WCC Publications, 2023), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.252.

3.3 Moral Discernment

The third study group followed up on the work on moral discernment in the churches that had been undertaken prior to the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan. Given the issues around the production and publication of *Moral Discernment in the Churches* (MDC), the Faith and Order commission agreed in 2015 to undertake two projects. The aim of the first—Church Traditions—was to present self-descriptions of traditions as they engage in a moral discernment process. The method was descriptive, not normative, and involved scholars from Eastern Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Historic Peace Churches, Baptist, Methodist, Disciples of Christ, and Pentecostal. The study group presented its initial findings to the Commission on Faith and Order in

2017 and 2019, and the results were published in 2020 in *Churches and Moral Discernment, Volume 1: Learning from Traditions.*

- *Churches and Moral Discernment, Volume 1: Learning from Traditions,* Faith and Order Paper No. 228 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.237.

The second study project, Historical Examples, focused on discernment processes that involved changing views on specific moral topics within different church traditions over the course of history, and in situations where the change had occurred in the past and was no longer debated in that tradition. The project received 19 papers from different traditions. The examples were chosen because they reflected different kinds of discernment processes and different kinds of changes. The authors were invited not only to explain the result of the respective discernment process, but also to pay particular attention to the sources of Christian moral discernment and the ways that it played a significant role during the discernment process. Again, the method was analytical and descriptive, not normative. The results were published in 2021 as *Churches and Moral Discernment, Volume 2:, Learning from History.*

- *Churches and Moral Discernment, Volume 2: Learning from History,* Faith and Order Paper No. 229 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.238/mode/2up.

The third study document published as part of this process, *Churches and Moral Discernmen, Volume 3: Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia*, harvests the fruits of the study process on moral discernment that began in 2015. In its analysis, the document describes patterns in the complex negotiations between continuity and change as churches respond to moral challenges. The study includes the presentation of a tool to help churches find a way to enter into constructive dialogue on moral issues and to help them speak about differences: differences that occur within a particular church and between churches; differences that occur at the same point in time (synchronic) and differences that occur over time (diachronic); and differences that occur between universal doctrine and local practice in specific contexts inspired by pastoral care. At its core, the study document invites the churches to more deeply understand the significance of "the conscience of the church" in moral discernment processes and points to its ecumenical potential.

- *Churches and Moral Discernment, Volume 3: Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia,* Faith and Order Paper No. 235 (WCC Publications, 2021), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.245.

4. Other Studies and Activities

4.1 Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches

Created in 1965, in the final year of the Second Vatican Council, this group brings together its 20 members annually; an executive group meets twice in between the annual meetings. The group's two co-secretaries—one from the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and one from the WCC—help to coordinate contact between the WCC and the dicasteries of the Vatican. Since the Fifth World Conference, reports of the Joint Working Group have been published in 1998, 2005, 2013, and 2022—coinciding with the assemblies of the WCC.

- Reports of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches; see WCC Digital Collecion: https://archive.org/details/jointworkinggrouprccwcc.

4.2 Spiritual Life and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Since 1968, the spirituality of the global ecumenical movement has been enriched as a result of the annual collaboration on the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity between the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity of the Vatican. Through the publication of these resources, Christians throughout the world are invited to be in prayer at least twice each year. In the northern hemisphere, the week takes place from 18–25 January, coinciding with the Feasts of Saints Peter and Paul. In the southern hemisphere, the observance occurs around the Feast of Pentecost.

- Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: Presentation and materials on the WCC website, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity.

4.3 Forum on Bilateral Dialogues

In addition to the major studies undertaken by Faith and Order following the Fifth World Conference in Santiago de Compostela in 1993, the commission has also provided a convening role for the Forum on Bilateral Dialogues. This is an ad hoc, non-institutional instrument of information, exchange, reflection, and orientation, inaugurated and sponsored by the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions. It involves those families participating in international bilateral dialogues. The Seventh Forum was held in Annecy, France, in 1997, on "Emerging Visions of Visible Unity in the Canberra Statement and

the Bilateral Dialogues." The Eighth Forum was held in 2001, also in Annecy, on "The Implications of Regional Bilateral Agreements for the International Dialogues of Christian World Communions."

- *Seventh Forum on Bilateral Dialogues, Emerging Visions of Visible Unity in the Canberra Statement and the Bilateral Dialogues, Annecy, France, May 1997*, Faith and Order Paper No. 129 (WCC Publications, 1977), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.186.
- *Eighth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues: The Implications of Regional Bilateral Agreements for the International Dialogues of Christian World Communions*, Annecy, France, May 2001, Faith and Order Paper No. 190 (WCC Publications, 2002), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.197.

4.4 United and Uniting Churches

Since 1967, a further convening role for Faith and Order has been in the organization of the Consultations of United and Uniting Churches. United and Uniting Churches are those that have been formed through the fusion of two or more separate churches, from the 19th century to the present. There are some 50 united churches today, found in all regions of the world. Many of these incorporate churches that were themselves formed from earlier unions, so that the total number of "uniting actions" may be as many as 150. The Commission on Faith and Order has, at their request, served as the common reference point for United and Uniting Churches, organizing a series of international consultations and publishing a survey of church union negotiations at regular intervals. Since the Fifth World Conference in 1993, consultations have been held in 1996 in Ocho Rios, Jamaica; in 2002 in Driebergen, Netherlands: in 2008 in Johannesburg, South Africa; and in 2015 in Chennai, India. Full reports were published of the consultations in 1996 and 2002; the messages of the 2008 and 2015 consultations were published in a single document

- *Built Together: The Present Vocation of United and Uniting Churches (Ephesians 2:22), Sixth International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches, March 1995, Ocho Rios, Jamaica*, Faith and Order Paper No. 174 (WCC Publications, 1996), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.181.
- *With a Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power, Seventh International Consultation of United and Uniting Churches*, Faith and Order Paper No. 195 (WCC Publications, 2004), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.202.
- *United and Uniting Churches: Two Messages*, Faith and Order Paper No. 225 (WCC Publications, 2019), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.234.

The Surveys of Church Union Negotiations from 1994 to 2006 can be consulted under the link below:

- *Surveys of Church Union Negotiations, 1994–2006*, Faith and Order Papers, https://faithandorder.short.gy/8gXmcD.

4.5 Towards a Common Date for Easter

The Feast of the Resurrection lies at the heart of the Christian faith, but finding a common date for that celebration has always been complex. Eastern and Western churches have used different calendars to calculate the date of Easter since the 16th century, and only rarely do they coincide. In Aleppo, Syria, in 1997, a consultation jointly sponsored by the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches produced the document "Towards a Common Date for Easter," with specific recommendations for the churches. Fresh impetus to explore the hope of a common date for Easter came in 2025, when a convergence of Eastern and Western calendars meant all Christians could celebrate Easter on a common day. 2025 also marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which addressed the need for a common celebration of the resurrection. The 2025 publication *Towards a Common Date for Easter* presents four contributions from different church traditions on the search for a way to celebrate Easter on a common date every year, as well as the text of the 1997 "Aleppo Statement."

- *Towards a Common Date for Easter*, Faith and Order Paper No. 241 (WCC Publications, 2025), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.257.

4.6 The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and For All

In 2016, the WCC's Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network (EDAN) presented to the WCC's central committee the document *The Gift of Being: Called to Be a Church of All and For All.* This publication was developed in consultation with the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The document explores the realities of "disability" experience interpreted from the perspective of creation, making the notion of human creatureliness central to theological reflection. Theological reflection on disability should not be limited to questions of rights and access but must include the theological anthropology of our Christian churches. The document can be found in the 2024 WCC publication, *Life in Church: Theological Reflections of Persons with Disabilities*.

- *Life in Church: Theological Reflections of Persons with Disabilities,* ed. Anjeline Okola and Syovata Kilonzo (WCC Publications, 2024), https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/life-in-church.

4.7 Growth in Agreement

Faith and Order sponsors the *Growth in Agreement* series, which publishes the reports and statements of international ecumenical dialogues involving two or more ecclesial traditions or the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order and the Joint Working Group with the Roman Catholic Church. The documents capture the rich theological discussions on topics or points of past disagreement or convergence, as well as efforts to forge new theological syntheses of insights from the participating dialogue partners. Three volumes of *Growth in Agreement* were produced between 1993 and 2025, covering the periods 1982–98, 1998–2005, and 2005–13.

- *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations at World Level 1982–1998*, Faith and Order Paper No. 187 (WCC Publications, 2000), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.194.
- *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue texts and Agreed Statements, 1998–2005*, Faith and Order Paper No. 204 (WCC Publications, 2007), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.211.
- *Growth in Agreement IV: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 2005–2013, 2 vols*, Faith and Order Paper No. 219 (WCC Publications, 2017), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.226.

4.8 Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition

In addition to these study processes, a major step forward in providing access to the history and work of Faith and Order has come with the launch in 2022 of the Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition. This collection offers free online access to Faith and Order documents going back to the preparations for the First World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne in 1927. It offers access not only to final reports of studies or world conferences, but also to the detailed records of plans and implementation that led to those results and to the documentation of the churches' movement from separation to reunion.

- Faith and Order Papers Digital Edition, WCC website, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/faith-and-order-papers-digital-edition.

ECUMENICAL HERMENEUTICS FROM SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA TO WADI EL NATRUN

Jane Stranz[*]

In 1993, the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order took place in Santiago de Compostela. One of the study themes that emerged at Santiago was that of ecumenical hermeneutics, and this led to the publication in 1998 of the Faith and Order study document *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels*.[14] The title is taken from 2 Corinthians 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (KJV). The subtitle is *An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics.* The document is structured around three rather unequal sections: *"Common Understanding of the One Tradition"; "One Gospel in Many Contexts";* and *"The Church as an Hermeneutical Community." The first section is the longest. A Treasure is written as a study document in the hope that "hermeneutics is not for experts."* In these reflections, I want to revisit the context in which this study on ecumenical hermeneutics emerged and to reflect on the meaning and importance of hermeneutics for the emerging ecumenical and ecclesial landscapes that Christian communities are part of today—locally, nationally, and internationally.[15]

From Santiago de Compostela to Harare

In his address to the Fifth World Conference in Santiago de Compostela, newly-appointed WCC general secretary Konrad Raiser encouraged the Commission on Faith and Order to address more urgently the issue of ecumenical hermeneutics, which had not been on the Faith and Order agenda since the publication of work in Montreal in 1963 and Louvain in 1971. Both of those studies were fairly

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14. *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper No. 182 (WCC Publications, 1998), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.189.

15. A longer version of this text was presented in French to the national study day of ecumenical officers in Liège, Belgium, in 2022, and subsequently published as Jane Stranz, "Herméneutique oecuménique: Un trésor de pentecôte enraciné dans la grâce de Babel," *Irénikon* 96, nos. 1–4 (2023): 5–31.

classical reflections on biblical hermeneutics and the hermeneutics of scripture, Tradition, and traditions.[16] At Santiago de Compostela, Raiser called for

> an ecumenical intercultural hermeneutic which will enable us to comprehend unity as a fellowship of those who continue to be different and to offer criteria for this. This does not mean to take for granted the sinful separations and divisions of the church or to be indifferent to the disintegration of the church universal. But a hermeneutic of this nature would have go beyond the much-discussed limits of diversity and consider also the limits of tolerable, acceptable unity, i.e., set criteria for "necessary and sufficient" unity.[17]

This was picked up by the WCC Commission on Faith and Order and led to a text being presented to the meeting of the Faith and Order Plenary Commission in Moshi in 1996.[18] At Moshi, Raiser reflected on the text and argued that the church should be understood as a "hermeneutical community." He saw this as having consequences for the way in which unity is understood. He built his argument on the call from the WCC's 7th Assembly in Canberra and then at Santiago for *koinonia* to be seen as the hermeneutical key to an understanding of unity: "*koinonia*, and hence the unity of the church, can and should be understood as a hermeneutical community of common confession, common action in discipleship, and common striving for the kingdom of God."[19] A study on hermeneutics, Raiser argued, should be seen as a response to trying to hold together four tensions or "fundamental relational fields" linked to the classical tasks of the church: oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity: the tension between the church of belief and the church of experience; the relationship of the church to the "world"; the relationship with other churches, and especially the relationship between universality and particularity as a crucial factor in church identity; and the church's relationship to history, with the sense on the one hand of an unbroken continuity with the church of the apostles, and, on the other, the memory of separation or rupture, as with Reformation and

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16. See *Report on Tradition and Traditions: Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order,* Faith and Order Paper No. 40 (WCC Publications, 1963), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.044; and "Interpreting the Sources of our Faith (Studies on Hermeneutics)," in *Faith and Order, Louvain 1971, Study Reports and Documents*, Faith and Order Paper No. 59 (WCC Publications, 1971), 9–34, https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.065/page/8.

17. Konrad Raiser, "The Future of the World Council of Churches and the Role of Faith and Order within the Ecumenical Movement," in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela, August 1993*, ed. Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann (WCC Publications, 1994), 171, https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.173.

18. "Towards a Hermeneutics for a Growing Koinonia," Appendix 2, in *Faith and Order in Moshi*, ed. Alan Falconer (WCC Publications, 1998), 264–82, https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.184.

19. Konrad Raiser, "A Hermeneutics of Unity," in *Faith and Order in Moshi*, 113–28, at 117.

post-Reformation churches.[1] The staging post of the Moshi meeting was then followed by the publication of *A Treasure* in 1998, a year that also marked the 50th anniversary of the WCC, its jubilee celebration, and the meeting of the WCC's 8th Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe.

A Treasure in Earthen Vessels

A Treasure in Earthen Vessels was written as a study document in the hope that "hermeneutics is not for experts" but a process all believers are involved in. It is a straightforward read and not too long. It chooses to take the path of a hermeneutics of coherence rather than of suspicion. Yet it also gives a good overview of how coherence and suspicion can mutually enrich the dynamics of ecumenical dialogue. The text examines not only interpretation of scripture and Tradition but includes experience, worship, and rites in its overview of ecumenical hermeneutics. However, the text has what I might term a rather well-behaved pneumatology. As the ecumenical movement—including Faith and Order—widens and deepens involvement from charismatic, evangelical, and Pentecostal Christians and churches, ecumenical hermeneutics needs to more clearly include Spirit-led and ecstatic forms of worship and teaching authority. In particular, I would argue that there is a need to address the hermeneutical role of hymnody and songs in terms of teaching authority—*lex cantadi lex credendi*?—providing also a link to the hermeneutics of poetics and spirituality. It is also useful to read *A Treasure* in the light of WCC and Vatican publications on mission. *Evangelii gaudium* speaks of mission to the margins; *Together Towards Life* speaks of mission from the margins.[2] What might an ecumenical hermeneutics to or from the margins look like?

The first section of the study document offers an overview of developments in interpretation of scripture, liturgical practices, and Tradition. The tone overall is pedagogical and seeks to affirm plural approaches to ecumenical hermeneutics. Two things struck me on reading this section more than 25 years after its publication. First, I wonder how much the accepted ecumenical insider-language of "one Tradition" speaks to all the churches, and in particular to those who are not at the ecumenical table, and to whom we must turn to become a truly ecumenical movement. I would reiterate this for the whole of the text.

1. Raiser, "A Hermeneutics of Unity," 120–24.

2. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel*, apostolic exhortation, November 2013. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,* statement submitted by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, September 2012, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Together_towards_Life.pdf. For a comparison of the two documents, see Jane Stranz, "*Ensemble vers la vie* et *Evangelii gaudium*: la mission et l'évangélisation vers les marges et depuis les marges," *Unité des chrétiens* 191 (July 2018): 27–29.

Second, this section repeatedly emphasizes the word *communication*. These lines gave me pause for thought: "Spoken words and visual images are especially significant in the increasingly powerful multimedia culture of today's world. A renewed appreciation of narrative forms of transmission sheds new light on processes of interpretation and communication."[3] *A Treasure* was written before the dawn of social media and the massive use of the internet. Today the use of videos is so ubiquitous that sociologists are beginning to speak about a "post-literate culture." This is an enormous challenge for Christian hermeneutics. The elements in this section of *A Treasure* that affirm oral and narrative transmission of gospel and Tradition only scratch the surface of this huge shift from reading to watching and/or listening.

The second much shorter section offers insights and challenges for ecumenical hermeneutics from the complex interplay between contextuality and catholicity. It calls for "an openness to *metanoia"* and affirms that *"no interpretation can claim to be absolute,"* while adding, *"catholicity enables communities to free one another from one-sidedness or from over-emphasis on only one aspect of the Gospel. Catholicity enables communities to liberate one another from being blinded or bound by any one context."*[4]

Once again, two comments. First, the text is full of good sense, but the assumed objective seems to reinforce the idea of unity. There is a presupposition that the desire to engage in a common ecumenical project already exists. I would have appreciated further attempts to set hermeneutics within the awakening of the desire for the ecumenical project. Second, this section could have addressed issues around what we might call "the clash of catholicities" or the showdown between hermeneutics. There are no insights from ecumenical hermeneutics on how Christians might learn to "disagree well" or better perceive why processes of "disagreeing well" are also sometimes, justifiably, contested. In a world where Christians and churches often act as if they are in competition rather than in cooperation, these are live issues for practical hermeneutics to engage with.

The third section offers intriguing perspectives on the church as hermeneutical community, ecclesial discernment, the truth of the gospel, *episkopé*, authority, and mutual accountability. In her essay "Hermeneutics and Ecclesiology," Simone Sinn argues that *A Treasure* advances the ecumenical movement because it takes "the step from debating theological propositions to methodologically reflecting the dialogue process itself."[5] Reading the third section, I also better understood Simone Sinn's critique that *A Treasure* reduces

3. *A Treasure*, "One Tradition and many traditions," §A.4, para. 36.

4. *A Treasure*, "Living in Diverse Contexts," §B.1, para. 39; "Contextuality and Catholicity," §B.2, para. 48.

5. Simone Sinn, "Hermeneutics and Ecclesiology," in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church,* ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge (Routledge, 2008), 586.

hermeneutics to a hermeneutics for the unity of the church. Despite believing myself to be a committed ecumenist, I am not sure I can always say with integrity: "There is a need to hold together the freedom for diverse expressions and the necessity to confess together *for the sake of unity,* in the spirit of mutual love and patience."[6] In all ecumenical endeavours, we need to take care that we can walk the talk of our aspirational declarations.

In the three parts and sixty-eight paragraphs of *A Treasure*, there is a brief allusion in the introduction to "the impossibility of eucharistic sharing being felt with pain by many Christians," mainly in relation to the churches not being clear "about the meaning of ongoing work toward visible unity."[7] As Simone Sinn points out, at its essence, hermeneutics is about significance.[8] Yet the text does not offer insights about the linguistic issues of transubstantiation and consubstantiation, memorial or real presence, nor offer any ecumenical hermeneutic of the eucharist, perhaps for fear of questioning the supposed convergence already reached in *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) in 1982. Yet we are surely now at a place in the ecumenical movement where we need to take up the hermeneutical reception of key documents such as BEM, particularly as churches who were not part of that process take their place at the table.

In the past 30 years I have often been in the privileged and painful position of being an ecumenical participant/observer at services and liturgies of other Christian communities and churches. I would argue that experiencing the *eulogia*, the *lex orandi* or liturgy of another Christian confession has to be as much part of our ecumenical theological endeavour as our more obvious work on the *lex credendi.* This is even more the case as Christianity grows in numbers and in confessional and cultural diversity.

A Treasure ends: "The church should not be imprisoned by holding on to inadequate answers from the past, nor should it silence the Word of God by endlessly putting off a clear recognition of the way this Word continues to impart meaning and orientation for human life. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in faithfulness to the living Tradition, and through genuine ecumenical forms of conciliar deliberation and reception, the church is called to "interpret the signs of the times."[9]

The challenges to the integrity of the church as a hermeneutical community can be summed up in three words: trust, hope, and truth. Is the hermeneutical community trusted or self-serving? Does the community know how to offer a gospel of hope and life in the face of real fears for the future and the present?

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6. *A Treasure*, "Authority, apostolicity, and mutual accountability," §C.3, para. 60.

7. *A Treasure,* "The origins of this study," Introduction, para. 11.

8. Sinn, "Hermeneutics and Ecclesiology," 589.

9. *A Treasure, "*Conclusion," para. 68

How does it speak truth to its own power and to the powers and dominions of the world?

Ecumenical Hermeneutics and "Ecumenical Space"

In his work on the social and communication paradigms of the ecumenical movement, Stephen Brown has set out three main paradigms from the founding of the WCC in 1948 up to about 2010.[10] The first—called "modernization"—ran from 1948 to the mid-1960s, a period when the WCC was still largely based on Protestant churches in Western Europe and North America. [11] The second paradigm—the "dependency" perspective—accompanied the global expansion of the WCC to encompass newly independent nations in the global South and was accompanied by a shift in ecumenical social ethics to reflect on the structural nature of global injustice. For Faith and Order this meant theologians from what was then called the Third World challenging the predominant Western European and North American ecumenical perspectives.[12] The third paradigm of "globalization" emerged at the WCC's assembly in 1991 at the cusp of the shift to a post–Cold War world, between the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. This new ecumenical paradigm emerged in the Canberra assembly's assertion of the need to look at *koinonia* as a model of ecumenical unity and the development of the "Common Understanding and Vision" (CUV) statement

10. See Stephen Brown, "Changing Paradigms in Ecumenical Communication," *Media Development* 59, no. 1 (2012) 33-39, and "Reclaiming Communication: Ecumenical Involvement in Communication for Justice and Peace," *Ecumenical Review* 72, no. 2 (2020), 284–302.

11. See Mary Tanner, "What is Faith and Order?" Paper presented at the Faith and Order consultation with Younger Theologians held at Turku, Finland, 3–11 August 1995, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/what-is-faith-and-order-mary-tanner.

12. On this shift, see the edited volume by Katharina Kunter and Annegreth Schilling, *Globalisierung der Kirchen Der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen und die Entdeckung der Dritten Welt in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014). Annegreth Schilling has noted how dependency theory, as a particularly Latin American concept, strongly influenced Protestantism on that continent and found its way into the ecumenical movement and the WCC in the early 1970s through theologians such as Julio de Santa Ana and José Míguez Bonino. See Annegreth Schilling, "Between Context and Conflict: The 'Boom' of Latin American Protestantism in the Ecumenical Movement (1955–75)," *Journal of Global History* 13, no. 2 (2018): 274–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022818000086. For Faith and Order, this meant theologians such as José Miguez Bonino challenging the predominant Western European and North American ecumenical paradigms. This came to a head at the Commission on Faith and Order meeting in Leuven in 1971, in the confrontation between Bonino and the Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff. See *Unity in Today's World: The Faith and Order Studies on Unity of the Church-Unity of Humankind*, Faith and Order Paper No. 88 (WCC Publications, 1978), 65, https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.094/page/65 ; Stephen Brown, "Globalization and the Unity of the Churches," in Kunter and Schilling, eds, *Globalisierung der Kirchen,* 143–67, esp. 153–55; Odair Pedroso Mateus, "José Míguez Bonino," in *Globalisierung der Kirchen*, 246–49.

for the World Council of Churches,[13] which was, in part, also an attempt to deal with this phenomenon of globalization. This is the context in which *A Treasure* developed, in which the vision of the church as a hermeneutical community may be seen also in Raiser's call for the creation of a common confession, common action in discipleship, and common striving for the kingdom of God. This reassessment, according to Konrad Raiser's report to the WCC's 8th Assembly in 1998, required the creation of an "ecumenical space" as an alternative to the dominant form of globalization.[14] The CUV document affirmed that such an alternative could be seen in the "distinctly different model of relationships [of the ecumenical movement], based on solidarity and sharing, mutual accountability and empowerment."[15] Ecumenical structures needed, according to CUV, "to reassess themselves in the light of the challenge to manifest a form and quality of global community characterized by inclusiveness and reconciliation."[16] There are clear parallels between Raiser's comments on ecumenical hermeneutics at Santiago and Moshi and the model of relationships within the ecumenical fellowship set out in CUV.

This was the context within which the search for an ecumenical hermeneutic (as set out in *A Treasure*) can be seen as part of this attempt to construct an "ecumenical space."

The Ecumenical Context

In many ways, the assemblies of the WCC are the pulse for the production by its various commissions of documents, a demonstration to the wider fellowship that organizational governance has been respected and work has been undertaken. However, the WCC's assembly in Harare 1998, to which I have already referred, tends to be remembered not for *A Treasure* but for other reasons. I will mention four:

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13. On the process that led to the Common Understanding and Vision statement, see Marlin VanElderen, "Common Understanding and Vision: A Survey of the Discussion in the WCC," *Ecumenical Review* 49, no. 1 (1997), 3–12.

14. Konrad Raiser, "General Secretary's Report," in *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, ed. Diane Kessler (WCC Publications, 1999), esp. 88–94 ("Opening Up Ecumenical Space"), https://archive.org/details/wcca25.

15. "'Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches': A Policy Statement adopted by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches and commended to member churches and ecumenical partners for study and action in September 1997," reprinted in *Ecumenical Review* 51, no. 1 (1999), 96–113.

16. Central to this new paradigm is what Raiser described in his book *Ecumenism in Transition* is an understanding of the *oikoumene* as a household, an *oikos*, the "one household of life created and preserved by God, that extends beyond the world of humankind, of the one human race, to creation as a whole." See Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?*, trans. Tony Coates (WCC Publications, 1991), 87–88.

- The WCC assembly was marked by considerable tension with Orthodox member churches. Two Orthodox churches—of Georgia and Bulgaria—withdrew from membership. A meeting of Orthodox churches in Thessaloniki before the assembly had issued a statement that while strongly affirmative of ecumenism as such, expressed serious reservations about the ways in which the WCC worked toward ecumenical goals, and called for a "Mixed Theological Commission" to discuss these issues. This led to the creation by the assembly of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC.[17]
- The assembly received and affirmed the CUV document, the result of an eight-year study process to try to deepen ecumenical understanding and involvement of its member churches within the WCC.
- In his report to the assembly, Konrad Raiser set out clearly the need to widen the ecumenical tent, with the "formation of a forum of Christian churches and ecumenical organizations . . . to create the space where a genuine exchange about the challenges facing the ecumenical movement can take place and where forms of cooperation can be worked out."[18] The WCC, along with the Catholic Church, needed to try to bring together those churches and organizations already taking part in the institutional ecumenical movement with Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Independent churches. This was the beginning of what is now known as the Global Christian Forum—a more mobile, less institutional ecumenical gathering. This full involvement of what is loosely referred to as world Christianity is also a key area for the future work of ecumenical hermeneutics.
- South Africa's President Nelson Mandela addressed the assembly, thanking the WCC not only for its theological condemnation of apartheid but for its ethical stance against it, in particular in the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). An ecumenical hermeneutics needs to find space for advocacy, taking sides, speaking the truth to power.

A Treasure was thus written and presented at a time of considerable internal tension and questioning within the WCC. The document generated some secondary literature and further work within Faith and Order on interpreting the interpreters.[19] However, ecumenical attention also moved on, first to the signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine on Justification (JDDJ) by the

17. "Thessaloniki Statement," WCC website, 1 May 1998, https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/thessaloniki-statement.

18. Konrad Raiser, "Report of the General Secretary to the WCC's eighth assembly, Harare, 3–14 December 1998," *Ecumenical Review* 51, no. 1 (1999): 92.

19. Peter Bouteneff and Dagmar Heller, *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics* (WCC Publications, 2001), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.196.

Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1999, and its use of the then relatively new ecumenical methodology of differentiated consensus, first developed in the Concord of Leuenberg in 1973. There are several places in *A Treasure* where I sense something similar to a differentiated consensus at play: in the attempts to reconcile context, Tradition, and traditions; and also in the discussions concerning authority and the reading of scripture. However, after the signature of the JDDJ in 1999, ecumenical enthusiasm was somewhat interrupted by the publication of *Dominus Iesus* in 2000 by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.[20]

Partly as a result of the work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC (whose report was published in 2002), multilateral theological work within Faith and Order focused more specifically, first, on the nature of the church and then on its mission, a process that led to the publication of *The Church Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV) in 2013.[21] At the same time a series of consultations and studies on interpretation of patristics were underway, as was work on ecumenical martyrology. The insistence on pluralism of interpretations and mutual accountability in *A Treasure*, its championing of the "hermeneutical community" and of the process of encounter certainly helped ground this work that followed it, even if it is not always acknowledged. It also serves as the foundation for the wide-ranging work on theological anthropology and moral discernment undertaken by Faith and Order in more recent years.

The Question of Diversity

Rereading and re-receiving *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels* more than 25 years after its publication, it becomes clear that we need an ecumenical hermeneutics of the language of dialogue to unpack our coded language and make it more accessible to the whole of the church as hermeneutical community.

In her 2009 presentation to the Faith and Order plenary commission, Minna Hietamäki set out the challenge of ecclesial diversity: "But how is it possible to identify the 'true Christian community' when the church's oneness can essentially be described only by diversity, that reaches from the very being of God to the variety of cultural and linguistic contexts and when the essence of the community lies in non-interchangeable relations?"[22]

20. Congregation for the doctrine of the Faith, *Domini Iesus*, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, 6 August 2000, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

21. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (WCC Publications, 2013), https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.221.

22. Minna Hietamäki, "Called to Be the One Church: How Much Diversity is Enough," in *Called to Be the One Church: Faith and Order at Crete*, Faith and Order Paper No. 212 (WCC Publications, 2012), 64, https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.219.

During the unity plenary and its subsequent press conference at the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022, Bishop Brain Farrell of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity called for ecumenical work on the hermeneutics of difference and put forward the idea of opening discussion on the meaning and purpose of ecumenism. Hermeneutical reflection helps us understand that *how we say and do things is as important as what we say.*

At the end of her essay on Hermeneutics and ecclesiology, Simone Sinn "highlights three insights that hermeneutical reflection can offer to ecclesiology." We might perhaps even call them three treasures: hermeneutics is a transformative process, a personal process, and a relational process.[23]

Re-reading *A Treasure* from my own context of the European churches, it is important to recognize what Christophe Monnot refers to as the "hyper-secularisation" of our context, while also acknowledging that this is not the case for churches in other parts of the world, where Christianity is growing both in numbers and in diversity. Monnot also calls on churches to be more aware of the evolving "hyper-diversity" that European Christians and churches experience in our parishes and in the linguistic and ethnic diversity of Christian communities around us.[24] The forging of (ecumenical) hermeneutical communities requires time and generosity that churches may not always have: some seek simply to survive.[25]

Toward Post-Globalization

I wrote earlier about the changing ecumenical paradigms of the ecumenical movement during the 20th century. At this point in the 21st century, it seems as though the world is entering a post-globalization paradigm marked not by structures that affirm global unity (even if from a neo-liberal perspective) but

23. Sinn, "Hermeneutics and Ecclesiology," 589.

24. Monnot's remarks were made in the context of the obligatory training that hospital, prison, and military chaplains undertake in France. See also, for example, Christophe Monnot, "Religion entre incertitude et cosmopolitisme: Hommage à Ulrich Beck," in *Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses* 34, no. 2 (2015), https://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-monde-et-cultures-religieuses-2015-2-page-15.htm.

25. See, for example, two studies, both ecumenical. The first is Europe-wide, more empirical, based on questionnaires, data, and qualitative input, and follow-up publications: Darrell Jackson and Alessia Passarelli, *Mapping Migration, Mapping Churches' Responses in Europe*, "Being Church Together" (Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe and WCC, 2008, 2016, 2020) https://ccme.eu/storage/app/media/images/publications/Mapping-Migration.pdf. The second takes a theological, ecumenical, dialogical, relational, and interview approach to its analysis, focusing on France and, more specifically, on the greater Paris region: Groupe d'Étude d'Istina, "Les Églises 'Delta': Comprendre des Églises nouvelles en France, tisser des liens nouveaux," *Istina* (January–June 2025).

by increasingly conflictual relationships.[26] This is also reflected in ecumenical and ecclesial relationships, and not only in the conflicts over sexuality and sexual ethics. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is one manifestation of these conflictual relationships; for the WCC and the wider ecumenical community, it presents also an ecclesiological, even conciliar challenge. It has exacerbated a fault line that has opened up within Orthodoxy, and at the same time raises questions about the meaning and nature of ecumenical fellowship. As the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe observed, "the issues raised by this conflict are indeed deep and fundamental, both for the ecumenical movement and for the wider world, and warrant intensive and sustained dialogue to address."[27]

We should be able to more clearly see that the world—secular and ecclesiological—in which we now practise ecumenical hermeneutics is fundamentally different from that in which *A Treasure* was developed. It will help us to begin to search out how to formulate ecumenical hermeneutical language in our own time.

We live also in a *kairos* where the urgency of the global climate crisis coincides with a time when the roles of international organizations and global governance are severely diminished, accompanied on one hand by fear of the autocracy of overwhelming state power and on the other hand to forms of self-reliance or autarchy. There is an echo of this suspicion of hegemonic narratives in some of the initial feedback from the WCC's recent assembly in Karlsruhe, suggesting that unity itself is viewed with some suspicion as too overarching or dominant a theme. Theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, David Tracy, Nicola Slee, and Henning Luther encourage us in different ways to stay with the theological and hermeneutical possibilities of the fragment. In the end a fragment of unity may prove to be more transformative than a superstructure of unity.

Some Inconclusive Conclusions

As I began to think about both treasure and the earthen vessel, an image came to mind of broken pots. In the final years of the 20th century, probably around about the same time as *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels* was published, I invited a colleague to preach in the French Reformed parish of which I was then minister. My colleague told me she would need three old-fashioned earthenware flowerpots for her sermon. The president of the elders' meeting was a market

26. Already in 2012, Stephen Brown questioned whether the world was moving toward a new period of "post-globalization," away from the interconnectedness that was said to underlie a multilateral system of global governance to the "vigorous reassertion of great power national interests." See Stephen Brown, "Shifting Communication Paradigms within the Ecumenical Movement," *Media Development* 59, nos. 3–4 (2012), 22-27.

27. "War in Ukraine, Peace and Justice in the European Region," in *Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity: Report of the WCC 11th Assembly. Karlsruhe, Germany, 2022* (WCC Publications, 2023), 67-74, https://archive.org/details/wcca32/page/16.

gardener and happy to oblige. The pots sat on the communion table, alongside the Bible and the bread and wine of the Lord's supper. In the first minutes of her sermon on the possibilities and impossibilities of forgiveness, my colleague deliberately smashed each of the pots. They made a satisfyingly loud noise and quite a mess. As we gathered around the communion table later in the service our feet crunched on the fragments of the pots, as in memory of Christ we received the broken bread and the poured wine of his body and his blood. The broken pots speak to me of searching for ecumenical hermeneutics to have not only methodologies that promote healing of memories or the practice of openness, but also the capacity to integrate brokenness and the visceral. This is what the Jewish-Anglican philosopher Gillian Rose is often quoted as calling a sense of "shakeness."[28] It is the experience of pain at horrific or traumatic events in the past or the present that, as the African American spiritual often sung on Good Friday puts it, "causes [us] to tremble, tremble, tremble."[29]

It seems to me that if we want an ecumenical hermeneutics, then it has to be one that is open and generous enough to seek out and celebrate the treasure within and between our traditions, a hermeneutics that offers bread not stone. Yet, hermeneutics also has to be robust enough to deal with eschatological issues and not avoid the visceral church and society issues of our time. The list is long: climate change and ecological crisis, sexual and spiritual abuse, economic systems that systemically abuse the poor, endemic gender injustice, and sexuality and anthropology more widely.

The Delta as the Space for Ecumenical Hermeneutical Engagement

I remain convinced that we need to reflect more on an incarnational visceral ecumenical hermeneutics, a new hermeneutics of storytelling, narratology, and authority for our post-literate times; a hermeneutics of advocacy, peace, and justice as we seek to protect planet and people; a hermeneutics of diversity and inclusion as we learn that ecumenism is wider than we imagined; a hermeneutics of spirituality and experience; and a hermeneutics of truth as we seek to combat conspiracy theories, hate speech, abuse, corruption, and autocracy.

Ecumenical hermeneutics does not bring things down to the lowest common denominator but always opens up new horizons filled with the possibility of understanding.

The WCC has visualized its own history through a river chart, with different streams and tributaries coming together to form a single river. Earlier

28. For more on Gillian Rose, see, for example, her memoir, *Love's Work: A Reckoning with Life* (Schocken, 1997).

29. "Were You There?," African American spiritual, likely from the 19th century.

I discussed three historical paradigms shaping the ecumenical movement. As we consider these paradigms in light of ecumenical hermeneutics, I would suggest that in our current era of post-globalization, the emerging ecumenical paradigm could be described as that of *deltafication*.[30] Created by the deposits the rivers carry as they reach the sea, deltas are ever-changing, diverse, and fertile estuary environments that require knowledge of the sea and the river in order to navigate the new water channels and islands that emerge. The very diversity of world Christianity indicates that cultivating relationships remains key to both widening and deepening ecumenical fellowship. The power and insight that theological fragments can offer to ecumenical hermeneutics is about finding tools and relationships that can help us navigate the ecclesial, ecumenical, and political complexities of our global times as we live with brokenness while resisting fragmentation. The space for this engagement is represented by the delta, an environment that is complex, fragile, changing, and in part unknown. The water that flows in new channels in the delta is the same water that has irrigated the ecumenical movement from the outset. New understandings of wholeness and unity emerge. It offers new possibilities for building relationships and sharing insights and meaning together. It also shows that ecumenical work on hermeneutics, on the ongoing meaning of "water and the word" (Eph. 5:26) remains important into the future.

As we look to the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order in Wadi El Natrun, we remember what the late Marcella Althaus Reid used to say to her colleagues: "We have work to do!"[31]

30. Conversations over coffee in the WCC cafeteria are difficult to footnote. However, it was former Faith and Order director Odair Pedroso Mateus I first heard speaking of the deltafication of the ecumenical movement, not entirely positively, as I remember it from more than a decade ago. I have been intrigued by the more positive aspects of deltafication since that first conversation. I would argue that as a paradigm the delta offers more room for agency, understanding, and unity than discourses of fragmentation.

31. As recounted in early 2011 by Maria Phaxsi Chavez Quispe to the author in the WCC library. It is surely fitting that the final footnote in a paper about ecumenical hermeneutics refers to an oral source from an Indigenous woman. They will have spoken together in Spanish, but it was recounted to me in English. May their memory be eternal.

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